

The Master's Plan

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Lesson 1

Man Needs God

I am a Christian and a member of the church of Christ. I want you to know why I am what I am. I, therefore, will be studying with you about this and many other things as we examine the Bible together.

Our lesson for this occasion deals with the subject of God, and why man needs Him.

When we speak of God, we are talking about the God of heaven, the One who created the earth and all things therein — the God who created us.

In Genesis 1:1 we read, ***In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*** Genesis 1:27 says, ***So God created man in His own image; in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.***

Now the first man and woman, like everything else, were created by a miracle. That is, God simply spoke them into existence, but then He put the law of nature into force. Ever since that time, all things have come into existence after their kind. That is, man, animals, and all living things have been given the power to reproduce themselves.

Speaking of God's creation, David said in Psalm 19:1-3, ***The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth His handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.***

Of all of God's creation, man is the only one that often curses his Maker instead of praising Him. But man has a greater need of God than all the other creatures put together. Man is different. He is physical but he is also spiritual. God made him in His own image, giving him an undying spirit to dwell in his body. This means that even though the body may die and return to the dust of the earth, the spirit does not die, but it lives on for all eternity. Speaking of man's death, we read in Ecclesiastes 12:7, ***Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*** The wise man recognizes and obeys His creator. It is the fool

who says in his heart, “***There is no God***” (Psalm 14:1).

God made humans in His image in another very important way: we can discern right from wrong, good from evil. No other living thing of creation has this ability. Much of our study will deal with this vital point, and the secondary point that God allows humans to choose whether they will obey Him and do good, or whether they will disobey Him and do evil.

Human beings possess intelligence. They are able to think, make decisions, and to choose what they will, or will not, do. Because man has this ability he often becomes full of pride. He feels important, and he thinks that he is as great as God Himself. He fails to see his need for God., but this is his mistake. Even though he can think and can do many amazing things, still in comparison to his Maker, he is infinitesimally small.

Man is a sinner. He is lost and he needs help. He needs forgiveness, and the only one who can do this is God Himself.

We were born into this world without sin. We did not inherit the sins of our forefathers, or even of Adam and Eve, the first human beings to sin. Ezekiel, a prophet of God, said, “***The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die***” (Ezekiel 18:20,21).

Some may be wondering what causes a child to be bad, if children are born without sin. You have heard children lie, say all kinds of bad things, and even to take the Lord’s name in vain. You have seen children steal and do many other things that are wrong. Now you are wondering how they can do all of these things if they are born pure and innocent and without sin. But let me ask you a question. How do children learn to speak a language? How do they learn to do all of the other things they do? You know that they learn these things by watching and listening to those around them. They are simply imitating others.

But you may ask, “Didn’t David say that in sin his mother

conceived him?" Yes, but who was the sinner? David, who was yet unborn, or his mother, who was an adult?

Jesus called a child and set him in the midst of those around Him, *"And said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me. But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea"* (Matthew 18:3-6).

My friends, infants and little children are not sinners, but we adults are. We are the ones who are guilty. Even when little children do wrong, adults are responsible. Go back and read again what Jesus had to say about offending a little child, and consider our grave responsibility as adult examples for the children who are watching us.

It is when a child grows up and becomes knowledgeable of right and wrong that one becomes a sinner. This means that all mature adults with normal minds are sinners. As such, one is lost, condemned before God, and if one dies in that state he or she will be lost for all eternity. Since we cannot save ourselves, or obtain forgiveness of our sins through good works or through some man-made religion, it means that we must look to God for help. Only God, through His grace and mercy, in giving His Son, Jesus, as a sacrifice for our sins, can save us. Paul said that even though we are sinners, *"... when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him"* (Romans 5:6-9).

To sum all of this up: God created humans. As individuals we were born into this world without sin, but when we became old enough to understand right and wrong, we became sinful. God, knowing our need and our inability to save ourselves, sent His own

Son to die for us, paying the price for our sins. As we become believers in God, and obey the teachings of Christ, He saves us. This obedience includes repenting of our sins, confessing Christ as the Son of God, and being baptized in water for the remission of our sins (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). When we do this, the Lord saves us and adds us to His church (Acts 2:47). Isn't that simple? And if we are faithful to the Lord until we die, we have the promise of eternal life (Revelation 2:10).

Lesson 2

Christ Is Man's Only Saviour

God made us and placed us here on this earth. Surely He wants us to know His will so that when we die we can spend eternity with Him. That is why He has inspired the writing of the Bible and has preserved it through the ages, so that we can know what He wants us to be and do. If we will read and study it, and make it the guide for our daily life, that promise of eternal life with our Lord will be ours.

How can we be saved? God has provided the Saviour: His son, Jesus Christ.

You might immediately ask, “But why does man need a saviour?” Many, of course, reject the idea of God, or that Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour of mankind. At the same time you can see for yourself where such people are, the kind of lives they live, and the mess that they are making in the world. Jeremiah, the prophet of God in old times, was right when he said, ***“O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself; it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps”*** (Jeremiah 10:23).

Man needs a saviour because he is lost, and he is lost because of his sins. The thought of being lost may be compared to one who has lost his way in his travels because he has gotten on the wrong road, or of a child being separated from his parents. Sin is what causes one to become lost, to be separated from God, since it is sin that comes between man and God.

Man did not enter the world with sin, but he became a sinner when he reached the age of knowing right from wrong, and then he began to violate God’s laws of rightness. The Apostle John said, ***“Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law; for sin is the transgression of the law”*** (1 John 3:4). Christ said, ***“Verily, verily, I say unto you, whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin”*** (John 8:34). The Apostle Paul tells us that the consequences of sin is death. We read, ***“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord”*** (Romans 6:23).

These verses show us that since man is a sinner, he is lost,

and he cannot save himself; therefore he needs a Saviour. But who could that Saviour be? Not another man, because he also needs to be saved. Not even a godly man, because he cannot be good enough or do enough good works to make it possible for him to save anyone.

So that brings us back to God and his Son, Jesus. God, the Father, saw that man was in sin, lost and without hope. He saw that it was impossible for man to save himself — or for the law, or any other system — to save him. So God chose to send His Son into this world to be born of woman, to live as a human, suffering every trial and temptation experienced by mankind. Hebrews 4:14,15 says, *“Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”* “*... He shall save His people from their sins*” (Matthew 1:21).

Christ was born, lived a sinless life, and was crucified upon a cruel cross for the sins of the world. John wrote, *“And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin”* (1 John 4:5). Peter said, *“For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow His steps: Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously; who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, and we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; but whose stripes ye were healed”* (1 Peter 2:21-24).

The Apostle Paul declared that *“Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures”* (1 Corinthians 15:3). Again, he said of Christ, *“Who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father”* (Galatians 1:4).

Think about it. Man was lost, with no hope, unable to save himself, in his sins, an enemy of God — but God, through His grace and mercy, was willing to send His only begotten Son to die on the cross, and Christ was willing to make that sacrifice so man might be

saved. That includes us, too. What a great price was paid for our salvation! What a great love was manifested on our behalf! Christ Himself said, ***“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”*** (John 3:16). Again He said, ***“This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you”*** (John 15:12-14).

But even though God gave His Son to be our Saviour, and Christ was willing to give His life that we and all people might be saved, that does not mean that everyone will be saved. First of all, we must believe in Him. Jesus said, ***“I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins; for if ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins”*** (John 8:24). Then, based on that belief, if we will obey Him, He will save us from our sins. He said, ***“If ye love Me, keep my commandments”*** (John 14:15). Can you imagine anyone wanting the Lord to save him, but refusing to believe in Him or to obey His commands? Surely not.

Christ commanded the apostles to take the Gospel to all the world, promising that those who would believe and be baptized would be saved, but warning that those who refused to believe would be lost (Mark 16:15,16). Peter and the apostles preached the Gospel to a group of people in Jerusalem, and on being convinced that Christ was the Son of God, they wanted to know what they should do. ***“Then Peter said unto them, repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost”*** (Acts 2:38). Then we read in Acts 2:47 that the Lord added the saved to His church.

Christ is the Saviour of all who will believe in Him and obey Him. The Hebrew writer said, ***“Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him”*** (Hebrews 5:8,9).

Lesson 3

The Bible Is God's Word

Do you believe the Bible to be the word of God? I hope you have a Bible, or at least the New Testament portion of it, but more importantly, I hope you believe it to be God's inspired word for man.

We are living in an unbelieving world, for the most part. Many do not even believe in the Creator of the universe, and many others do not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. No wonder the world is in the state it is in.

The Bible is the world's best selling book. It is printed and distributed in most languages around the globe. Yet, there are any number of other so-called holy books. What is the difference between the Bible and all of these other books? It is simply the difference between reading God's word and man's word. Any person who will make a study of these various books, take the time to compare them, consider their historical background, their geographical references, and their teachings, will surely be able to see the contrasts. The books of men rely heavily on myths, unrealistic stories, illogical events, and such like. They may have a "prophet" or a central figure, but none of them show a saviour or how man can be forgiven of his sins. Also, take a look at those who follow such man-made books and see the kind of lives they are living and the kind of fruit they are producing.

Now take a look at the Bible. It gives a history of man. It tells of man's good points, but it also tells of his sins and mistakes. It has been found to be true historically, geographically, and in every other way. It tells of God's love for man and how He sent His Son into the world to be man's saviour. It encourages a better life and gives hope of life beyond the grave. There is no book in the world that can compare to the Bible.

God made man and placed him here. He therefore has always communicated with him for the purpose of declaring His will. The Hebrew writer tells us, "***God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath***

appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the world” (Hebrews 1:1,2). That statement simply means that God has spoken in different times and in different ways, but the fact remains that He has always spoken to man. Today He speaks to us through Christ, as set forth in the pages of the New Testament.

Peter tells us, speaking of the word of God, ***“For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”*** (2 Peter 1:21). Here the point is being made that these writings were not given by man but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Another way of putting it, the Holy Spirit guided specific ones to write God’s word. Because of that, we have no right to privately interpret it (2 Peter 1:20). We must leave God’s word as it is, believe it, and obey it.

Paul said, ***“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”*** (2 Timothy 3:16,17). Again Peter reminds us, ***“As His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue”*** (2 Peter 1:3). In these verses it is being affirmed that God has given His word, it is all inspired of God, it furnishes man to every good work, and He has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness.

When Christ came to this world He became God’s spokesman. We read, ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made”*** (John 1:1,2). Reading on, in verse 14 Christ is revealed as being that Word. On another occasion we are told that God spoke from heaven and said, ***“This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!”*** (Matthew 17:5). Christ said, ***“Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away”*** (Matthew 24:35).

But how did the Bible, as we know it, come about? As we read earlier, the Holy Spirit directed men in centuries past to write down what was revealed to them. These messages were copied and handed down from one generation to the next. In the days of Christ, He and the others read from the Old Testament Scriptures. Then

the Holy Spirit guided men like Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter, Paul, and others to write the books of the New Testament. These were originally penned in Greek. They were gathered together to form the “New Testament” which has been translated into many languages, and passed on down to us today. As a result, we have God’s word in the “Bible”, which means, “the book”. But how do we know it is His word? If God has the power to give it, wanting man to know His will, then He had the power to preserve it.

God does not speak directly to man today in new revelations. Rather, He speaks to us through the written word. John wrote, *“And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name”* (John 20:30,31). Paul declared, *“So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”* (Romans 10:17).

In Revelation 22:18,19 we are warned: *“For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.”* These statements assure us that God’s final words to humanity had been spoken and recorded. We are not to add to it, subtract from it, or change it in any way. God wanted us to know His will, has revealed it to us, and that is final.

If we want to know God’s will for us today we must go to the New Testament and study it with an open mind, ready to accept what it says. There we read about Christ, His life, His death, burial, and resurrection; we learn the commands of the Gospel and how we can be saved; we read of the beginning of the church, and there are instructions on how to live the Christian life. Finally, we are told that in the last day we will be judged by that word (John 12:48).

Do you believe the Bible? Only the Bible, God’s word, will make possible that eternity with Him.

Lesson 4

What Sin Does

Sin is defined in the Bible as transgressing God's law, or going beyond God's will. It is the breaking God's law, disobeying His teaching (1 John 3:4).

We are living in a time when not much is said about sin. Those people who do bad things are said to be sick, mentally or physically, but seldom are their deeds said to be sinful. When their actions bring terrible consequences, the disastrous results are discussed at great length, but it is never pointed out that the way to do away with the consequences is to quit engaging in the sin that produces them.

Does that mean that sin no longer exists? Not at all. Sin exists today as always. It just means that man does not want to acknowledge his sin, or he does not want to call it sin. It further means that he simply wants to do as he pleases but at the same time to remain accepted and respectable in the world.

Not only does sin continue to thrive in the world, but many glory in it. It used to be that if a crime was committed, those who were responsible wanted it to remain a secret. Now the terrorists of the world call those in authority and take credit for what has been done. Those who are immoral seem to delight in the publicity they receive. A few years ago homosexuals were very secretive about their conduct but now they publicly proclaim their sexual activities and make demands to be accepted by society. Movies and television have done much to break down man's feelings toward all kinds of wicked things.

Sin is not of God, but is of the devil. The Apostle John said, ***"He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil"*** (1 John 3:8). Again, he said that all unrighteousness is sin (1 John 5:17).

What we must realize is this: if we sin, we will suffer the consequences, maybe even physically, but certainly spiritually, and especially if we fail to repent. One may even have to suffer phys-

ically for his sin, even though he may have repented of it. For instance, one may have committed a robbery earlier in his life, and he may have repented of that, but he may have to serve a term in prison because of his past conduct. One cannot sin without having to pay a price for it. The Apostle Paul declared, ***“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life”*** (Galatians 6:7,8). Again, he said, ***“But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality”*** (Colossians 3:25). We might break man’s law and somehow get by without getting caught, but we can’t break man’s law or God’s law without God knowing about it. Furthermore, when you break God’s law, physically or spiritually, there is a price to be paid. We are told that, in the end, the wages of sin brings death (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The Bible teaches that one day all of us will have to meet the Lord and give account for the deeds done in the body, whether they be good or bad. On that day, Paul says, ***“So then each of us shall give account of himself to God”*** (Romans 14:12). Continuing, he warns, ***“For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad”*** (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Someway, somehow, in this life we may escape paying the full penalty for some of our sins, but when we meet the Lord at the final day of judgment, all will be open before Him, and we will have to answer for every sin committed that has not been covered by the blood of Christ. On that day, all of the unredeemed will be cast into the lake of fire, where they will be forever punished for their evil deeds. What a terrible day that will be for those who are unprepared to meet God.

Is there a way that one can be forgiven of his sins? Indeed there is. Only in the religion of Christianity can you find a Saviour and forgiveness. Christ offered Himself as a sacrifice, dying on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. He said, ***“For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins”*** (Matthew 26:28). Paul stated, ***“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches***

of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

Through that sacrifice, Christ made it possible for all men to be saved from their sins — but, in order to be cleansed by that blood, there must be acceptance on man’s part that Christ is the Son of God: unless we **believe** in Him we will die in our sins (John 8:24).

We are also commanded to **repent** of our sins, to turn away from a life of wrong-doing. We are warned that if we do not repent we will perish (Luke 13:3). Peter preached that we must repent (Acts 2:38) and that the Lord would have all men everywhere to repent (2 Peter 3:9). Paul underscored this when he said that God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30).

Next, Christ said that we must **confess** before men that we believe Him to be the Son of God if we expect Him to confess us before the Father in heaven (Matthew 10:32). Paul said the confession is to be made unto salvation (Romans 10:10).

And finally, the Lord has commanded that we **be baptized**, buried in water in likeness to His burial in the grave, so that we may rise to walk a new life. He stated plainly that we must believe and be baptized to be saved (Mark 16:16). At the time Paul obeyed the Lord, he was commanded to arise and be baptized to wash away his sins (Acts 22:16) so that he would be **saved**.

When we are saved, what happens? The Lord **adds us to His church** (Acts 2:47). And then what? As a saved person, as a follower of Christ, as a Christian, we must strive to **live the faithful Christian life**. That doesn’t mean that we will live a sinless life, but it does mean that we cannot go out and purposely and intentionally sin and expect to go to heaven. John said, **“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin”** (1 John 1:7).

But you might want to know why it is necessary to do all of that, when Jesus has already died to pay the penalty for our sins? Because when you are in sin, and you know what the consequences of sin are, and you want to be forgiven of your sins, you must do what the Lord has required because He is the only one who has the power to forgive sins. If you are not willing to obey Him, you cannot be saved.

Lesson 5

The Soul of Man

There is nothing more important in this life than knowing God's will. We must come to know what He would have us to do so that we can obey Him, be saved, and have the hope of eternal life.

Speaking of important things, we are going to be studying about the soul of man during this lesson. Christ said, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matthew 16:26). Did you know that you have a soul and that it is worth more than all of this world? Can you imagine that? Christ said that you could gain the whole world, but if you lost your soul, what good would the world be to you? Again He asked, "Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" If your soul was lost, and you had the opportunity to gain it back, what would you be willing to give for it? Would you be willing to give up your sins, your worldliness, your riches, and all that you have, that you might have your soul back? Would you be willing to give your heart and soul to the Lord, to obey Him, to worship Him, and to faithfully serve Him, that you might be saved in this world and in the world to come? If you truly understand the value of your soul, you will want to put it before everything else. Christ thought enough of your soul that He was willing to die for it. That's right. He died that your soul might be saved, just as He died that all other souls might be saved. The scriptures tell us that it is through the blood of Christ, and obedience to the truth of the Lord, that this is made possible. Peter wrote, "Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love for the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever" (1 Peter 1:18-23).

Man is a dual being. He is two in one. He has a physical body but he also has a spiritual body. That is, every human being has a spirit or soul that lives within his body. It takes both the body and soul to make one unit. One cannot live without the other. James said, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also” (James 2:26).

The body is important but the soul is more important. The body came from the earth and when it dies it will return to the dust of the earth. But the soul came from God and when the body dies the soul of man shall depart from its fleshly body and return to God who gave it. Solomon wrote in the long ago, “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

Christ taught that the body can be killed but that the soul cannot be killed. He said, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

Now, what about your soul? What are you doing to save it? No one can save it but Christ, but Christ cannot save it unless you are willing to give yourself to Him. To do that you must realize that you are in sin, that you are lost, and that you need to be saved. Next you must realize your need for the Lord, that He died for you, that He shed His blood that you might have the remission of your sins, and that it is only through Him that you can be saved. To acknowledge that means you believe that He is the Son of God, and that He has the power to save you. But that is not all. Christ died to save you from your sins, and that means that He will not save you as long as you continue to walk in sin. If you want to be saved, then you must repent of your sins or turn away from them. Next, you must be willing to confess Christ as the Son of God. When Philip preached to the man from Ethiopia in Acts 8, before he was willing to baptize him he wanted to know if he believed with all of his heart that Christ was the Son of God. Once he was willing to confess with his mouth that he did believe with all of his heart, then Philip was ready to baptize Him. Likewise, for one to obey the Lord today he must be willing to make the same confession. And finally, there is baptism. Baptism is a burial in water, and it is through the act of baptism,

in obedience to the Lord's command, that one has his sins washed away, and therefore he is cleansed, purified, and forgiven of all of his sins. We read this in Romans 6, Mark 16:16, and Acts 2:38.

After Peter and the apostles had preached the gospel to a large number of people on the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem, the record says, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:41). Please note that it says that three thousand souls were added to the church (Acts 2:47). The souls of these people were the ones that were important, the ones that were saved and added to the church.

Those souls that obey the Lord, and remain faithful to the Lord, will be the ones who go to heaven. Paul wrote the Corinthian Christians about this, and said concerning the things that will come to pass, "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed — in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:50-58).

My friend, is your soul prepared to meet God? Please do not let it be lost. It is your most valuable possession.

Lesson 6

The Gospel of Jesus Christ

I want to study with you at this time about the gospel of Jesus Christ. I think it is very important that we know what the gospel is, and what it does.

The first four books of the New Testament are generally referred to as the gospels, but we read also of the gospel in the other

books of the New Testament. Actually, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the four books that are spoken of as the gospels, tell the story of only one gospel. That gospel is the good news of the coming of Christ and how He died for our sins, was buried, and on the third day was resurrected from the dead to return to the Father in heaven, to sit at the right hand of God. That is the meaning of the word gospel, that is good news.

To understand the gospel as being good news you must understand that man was lost in sin, without God and hope, and then out of love God sent forth His only begotten Son to come into this world of sin and sorrow to be born of woman, to take upon Himself the likeness of a man, to live among men, to live without sin and then finally to die on the cross for the sins of the world. But that was not all; He also came forth from the grave as a resurrected Lord and then He returned to the Father in heaven where He remains to this day, and He will continue there until He comes again. So the good news of the gospel is, that as a result of the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, it is possible for man to be saved and to have the hope of eternal life.

In writing to the Corinthian Christians, Paul said, “Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

The good news then, or the gospel, is simply based on the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. Had there been no death, burial, and resurrection there would have been no gospel or good news.

Because of what the gospel is, what it represents, and the hope that it brings to man and the world, after the Lord had been crucified on the cross, had been buried, and had been resurrected, He gathered His apostles around Him and commanded them to take the gospel into all the world. Mark recorded His words like this: “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He

who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15,16). Matthew recorded this statement: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; for lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:18-20). Luke put it like this: "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me. And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures. Then He said to them, Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:44-48).

You will note that in sending forth the apostles that Christ made it clear that He was sending them on the basis of His authority in heaven and earth. Furthermore, He was able to send them with authority based on the fact that He had died, had been buried, and had been resurrected. He could therefore send them to preach this good news. He then commanded them to take this good news to all the world, to every nation of all the world, and even to every creature of every nation of all the world. He wanted all to be told of this good news. Not only that, but He told them that they should preach that those who would believe, repent of their sins, and be baptized would be saved.

Since Christ commanded the apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel, it is obvious that one must hear the gospel. Paul says that faith comes by hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17). Next, if the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is preached, it means that if one is going to be benefitted by that, he must believe in Christ, and that Christ died, was buried, and was resurrected. Of course there are many scriptures that emphasize the necessity of belief or faith when it comes to Christ and the salvation that He offers. The Hebrew writer says that it is impossible to please God without faith (Hebrews 11:6). Christ said that if we believe

in God that we must also believe in Him (John 14:1). Now if one believes in Christ, and wants to be saved from his sins, then surely he must understand that he cannot go on purposely and intentionally engaging in sinful activities. Therefore, we come to repentance or that of one turning away from his sins. And finally, Christ commanded baptism. Paul tells us in Romans 6 that when one obeys the Lord that he pictures the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ in his obedience. That is, he dies to his sins, he is buried in the waters of baptism, and then he is brought up out of the water or he is resurrected from that watery grave to live a new life in Christ. That is why Christ commanded the apostles to go forth and preach baptism — not baptism only, but baptism as it is related to Christ's death, burial, and resurrection and the salvation that results from it. So in conclusion, Christ taught that those who would believe in Him, repent of their sins, and be baptized, He would save them. This would be good news indeed.

Let us now review what we have studied and show what the results are. First, the gospel means good news or glad tidings. Paul said, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Romans 10:15). Second, the facts of the gospel are the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ which must be believed (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Third, the commands of the gospel are belief, repentance, and baptism which must be obeyed (Mark 16:16). Paul declared that the Lord will come back one day to punish those who have not obeyed the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Fourth, and finally, the result of all of this is that those who become believers in Christ and obey the gospel are saved by Christ, receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Lord adds them to His church, and they have the hope of eternal life. This is taught throughout the book of Acts of the New Testament.

Do you believe the gospel? Have you obeyed it? If not, we hope you will.

Lesson 7

The Faith that Saves

The theme for our study at this time will have to do with the faith that saves. We'll be going to the Bible for the things that we will have to say.

In a broad sense, the faith that we are thinking about incorporates all that God has said in the Bible, the religion of Christianity, our worship, and living the Christian life. It is all that we believe and all that we do in obedience to God. It is the one faith that we read about in Ephesians 4:5. There are many expressions in the scriptures that refer to that faith, like the faith that is spoken of throughout the world (Romans 1:8), the word of faith which we preach (Romans 10:8), remembering your work of faith (1 Thessalonians 1:3), that you should content for the faith (Jude 3), etc.

Then there is one's personal faith that is based on acceptance of God, Jesus Christ as the Son of God, and the Bible as being the word of God. This faith is defined as being belief, trust, and acceptance. The Hebrew writer put it like this: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). In other words, we have never seen God, but we believe that He exists because of the evidences all around us that proves His existence. We see the world, all living things, including ourselves. We have never seen Christ, but there were witnesses and records to prove that He lived. Based on these various evidences, then faith and confidence are produced in our minds and lives.

It is this kind of faith in God, Christ, and His word that leads us to obey God. It is not a blind faith, a dead faith, or just a mental faith. Rather, it is a faith that begins in the mind, but it does not end there. The faith that I am speaking of is the kind that will lead one to do whatever God asks him to do. This is a living faith, a saving faith. It is like Paul said about love in 1 Corinthians 13. He said that one could have enough faith to remove mountains but if he didn't have love, he was nothing. Likewise, one could have all kinds of faith but if he didn't believe the Lord enough to do what He has commanded, it is worthless. James said, "What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily

food, and one of you says to them, Depart in peace, be warmed and filled, but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead" (James 2:14-17).

The Bible no where teaches that faith only saves. To the contrary, it teaches that faith must be accompanied by works. James says, "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only" (James 2:24). He goes on to say, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (James 2:26). Does that mean that we are saved by works? No, these scriptures do not teach that we are saved by works, that is, by works only. We are not saved by faith only or by works only. Rather, we are saved by faith and works, a faith that leads us to do the works of God. Another way of explaining it, that means we must have enough faith in God to do what He has asked us to do. When we have that kind of faith that means we have a working faith, a saving faith.

Let us take a closer look at the faith that saves. First of all, how does this faith come or how is it produced? Paul tells us, "So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). True, one might be convinced that there is a God in heaven by seeing those things that He has created, but to specifically know God's will, and what one must do to be saved, he must hear God's word as set forth in the Bible. He can do this by personally reading the scripture or by hearing the word of God faithfully proclaimed. There is no other way to know God's will.

But once one hears the word of God, faith is produced. As one is taught of God, Christ, and the gospel, then he begins to believe what he hears. The Hebrew writer said, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6). Christ said, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me" (John 14:1). Paul declared, "For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:10). It should be pointed out here that as important as faith or belief is to salvation, and as important as the confession is to salvation, in both cases, the apostle Paul said that they are unto salvation. This means that belief

and the confession leads one toward salvation. It does not follow, however, that because of one's belief or because one has confessed Christ to be the Son of God, that person is saved.

In spite of the importance of faith, there is more. One must believe or have faith in God and Christ to be saved, but that alone is not enough to save one. To be more exact, one's faith leads one to go on and do whatever the Lord says that he must do to be saved. One of those things is repentance. But what is repentance? It is that of turning away from sin. Sin is brought about through transgressing God's law or disobeying God. One cannot continue to do that and expect the Lord to save him. Therefore, he must quit doing those things that are contrary to the Lord's will. Christ warned that we must repent or perish (Luke 13:3). Paul said that God commands all men everywhere to repent (Acts 17:30). Peter said that one must repent and be baptized to have the remission of his sins (Acts 2:38). Now, why should we do that? Because Christ says that we must do that! This means that if we believe in Christ we will do what He has said. If we refuse to do it then it means that we do not believe the Lord enough to do what He says, and if we do not obey Him, then we cannot be saved.

The scriptures also teach that we must confess that Christ is the Son of God. Christ says that if we will confess Him before men that He will confess us before the Father in heaven (Matthew 10:32). Philip told the man from Ethiopia that he could be baptized if he believed in Christ with all of his heart (Acts 8:37). He said that he believed that Christ was the Son of God, and based on this confession, Phillip baptized him. But please note that he was not willing to baptize him until he made this public confession. Notice also that it was his faith in Christ that prompted him to make the confession, but the confession was necessary for him to obey the Lord.

And finally, Christ taught that one had to be baptized to be saved. He said, "He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:16). Peter told a group of believers in Jerusalem to repent and be baptized that they might have the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38). And so on with all the other conversions listed in the Book of Acts. But how can baptism have a part in one's salvation? Because Christ said that

one must be baptized, and when one believes in the Lord enough to do what He says, then he can be saved, but not until.

The saving faith of the Bible not only leads one to obey the gospel but to live the faithful Christian life.

What kind of faith do you have? Is your faith strong enough to do what the Lord has commanded? Only when you have that kind of faith can you be saved.

Lesson 8

The Need for Repentance

In this lesson we will be studying about the need for repentance. Repentance is a Bible subject, but it is seldom discussed, but sorely needed throughout the world.

Christ taught that one must repent of his sins in order to be saved and to be a member of His church.

The word "repentance" suggests a change, a turn, being willing to give up that which is bad and wrong, quitting bad habits, and going in another direction. It means to have a change of heart or change of mind concerning one's life. It means to turn and go in the opposite direction. In other words, when one repents of his sins that means he gives up his sins in order that he might follow Christ.

Christ preached that one must repent or perish (Luke 13:3). Paul said, "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Peter proclaimed, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9).

But how does repentance fit into the gospel, in obeying the gospel? As we have just read, the Lord has definitely commanded that one and all repent, that is, that they turn from their sins. But is this all that is required of those who want to be saved? No, this is just a part of what the Lord requires of one. Let's take a closer look.

The gospel is the good news that Jesus Christ died for man's sins, that He was buried, and that He arose from the grave (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Now the Lord would have us to believe those facts. We surely couldn't expect Him to save us if we did not believe them. But if we believe that God is, and that Christ is a resurrected Lord, then what more does the Lord require of us? This is where repentance comes in. Since the Lord died on the cross that we might be saved from our sins, He certainly will not save us if we are determined to continue to live in them. Therefore we must repent of our sins, or turn away from our wrong doings, if we expect the Lord to forgive us. When Peter and the apostles preached to the people on the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem, the record says that they were cut to the heart, or became convinced that Christ was the

Son of God, and then they wanted to know what else they should do. The answer came immediately: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Now what if they had been unwilling to repent of their sins, and some of them had taken part in the Lord’s crucifixion? Do you think for a minute that they could have been saved anyway? No indeed. The only possible way that the Lord could save them was for them to repent of their sins, and then to be baptized for the remission of their sins, even as they were told.

Again, in Acts 3, after Peter had preached to another large crowd of people in Jerusalem, he concluded with this exhortation, “Repent therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19). Repentance then was a very essential part of their obedience. They could not be forgiven of their sins, or become members of the Lord’s church, without complying with this command.

Going on through the Book of Acts, and considering one case of conversion after another, it is evident that each one who obeyed the Lord had to repent of his sins. This included the Samaritans and the Ethiopian in Acts 8. Then there was Saul, who had previously made havoc of the church. And Cornelius, who was a good man, but was not saved until Peter went to him and preached the gospel so that he might obey the Lord. There are other cases of conversion recorded in Acts. All those people heard the same gospel, obeyed the same commands, were all saved alike, and all became members of the Lord’s church. Among other things, all of them repented of their sins. No where in the scriptures do you read of anyone becoming a child of God, and a member of the Lord’s church, without repenting of his sins. That means that not one soul can be saved apart from repentance.

Another way of explaining what takes place in repentance is stated in Romans 6. There Paul says, “What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were bap-

tized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection" (Romans 6:1-6). Please notice what Paul said. He explained that when one obeys the Lord that he dies to his sin, and that is repentance. He talks about the old man being crucified that the body of sin might be destroyed. So then once repentance takes place, or when one dies to his sin, then next comes the burial. The individual is buried in this case, along with his sin, in the waters of baptism. In his obedience he comes into contact with the blood of Christ which cleanses him from his sin. Then finally, he comes up out of the water, which is described as a resurrection from that watery grave. In doing all of this one pictures in his obedience the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ.

On another occasion Paul said, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Putting away the old things there has reference to repentance, and one becomes a new creature through the new birth that takes place through baptism (John 3:3-5).

In Colossians 3 Paul talks to the Christians there at Colosse about putting off the old man of sin and putting on the new man of righteousness in Christ. In other words, in obeying the Lord to become a Christian they had to repent of their sins.

Now if that is what the Lord required in the first century, then what does He expect of you and me? He would have us to do the same thing. That is, if one wants to be saved today Christ would have him to believe in Him, to repent of his sins, to confess Him as the Son of God, and to be baptized for the remission of his sins. When one does this, the Lord has promised to save that person and add him to His church.

What about you? Have you repented of your sins? Have you obeyed the Lord? Are you a Christian? Are you a member of Christ's church? If not, please become one.

Lesson 9

Why Baptism Saves

In this lesson we want to explain to you why baptism saves. Most people are confused concerning the role baptism plays in their obedience to the Lord. Many of them do not see baptism as being of any importance at all. As a matter of fact, they think that it is possible to be saved without being baptized. But the question is, what does the Bible teach on this subject?

Baptism is a Bible subject. The word baptism itself is defined as being a burial or an immersion. Paul said, "...buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead" (Colossians 2:12). Again, he said, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3,4).

Not only is baptism defined as burial, but the scriptures say that it is a burial in water. An example of this is to be found in Acts 8 when the record says that after Philip had taught the man from Ethiopia, and he had confessed Christ as the Son of God, then "they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39).

Now that we know what baptism is, what is the importance of it? First, it is a command of God. After Peter had preached to Cornelius and his household, he asked, "Can anyone forbid water, that these should not be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have? And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:47,48). Second, it is said that baptism saves. Again Peter says, after showing how Noah and his family were saved by water, "There is also an antitype which now saves us — baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 3:21). Third, Christ included baptism in the great commission: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel

to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15,16). Fourth, baptism is for the remission of sins. "Then Peter said to them, repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Fifth, baptism washes away sins. Saul was told, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

Sixth, baptism puts one into Christ. Paul said, "Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?" (Romans 6:3). To the Galatian Christians, he said, "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Galatians 3:26,27). Seventh, baptism puts one into the body, or the church. To the church at Corinth, Paul wrote, "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body — whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free — and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Corinthians 12:13). And eighth, baptism produces the new birth. We read, "Jesus answered and said to him, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to Him, How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born? Jesus answered, Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God" (John 3:3-5). Here Christ was teaching Nicodemus concerning the coming of the kingdom, or church, and what one would have to do to enter into it. Later we read that baptism puts one into the church. Likewise, we are told that baptism puts one into Christ and on entering Christ he becomes a new creature. Finally, baptism is a burial, and therefore when one is buried in water, and he comes up out of that water, a birth takes place. That is the new birth that Christ spoke of in John 3:3-5.

In Matthew 28:19,20 Christ says that those who obey the Lord must be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and last of all Paul speaks of one baptism in Ephesians 4:5. There had been other baptisms, but by approximate-

ly A.D. 64 he said that there was but one baptism. That one baptism is the one that we have defined and discussed in this study.

As you read through the book of Acts, you will note that there are some eleven cases of conversion mentioned there. In every case, baptism was required of those who were obeying the Lord.

The Bible no where teaches that baptism only saves. Neither does God's word talk about water salvation. Still, baptism is essential to salvation on the basis of the scriptures that we have already noted. First, one must hear God's word preached. Then it is necessary that one become a believer in God, and Christ as being the Son of God. Next the scriptures teach the necessity of repentance or that one turn away from his sins. That is to be followed by confessing that Christ is the Son of God. And then finally, one must be baptized, buried in water, for the remission of his sins, to enter Christ and His church. Just as one cannot be saved without faith, or repentance, or confessing that Christ is the Son of God, neither can one be saved without being baptized (Romans 10:17; Hebrews 11:6; John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Matthew 10:32; Mark 16:16).

It is through obeying these commands of God, and baptism in particular, that the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is pictured. Christ died, was buried, and then was resurrected. In obeying the Lord one dies to his sins, is buried in the waters of baptism, and then is raised or resurrected from that watery grave to walk in newness of life. So every time scriptural baptism takes place the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ is being symbolically portrayed. Furthermore, each one who is scripturally baptized is saying to the world that he believes in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. This is a powerful lesson within itself.

Have you been scripturally baptized? If not, you need to be. And remember, when you obey Christ in the waters of baptism, then He will save you and add you to His church.

Lesson 10

The Importance of Obedience

We will continue our Bible study by discussing the subject of the importance of obedience. We are living in a world today where there is a great deal of disobedience. This applies to both man's relationship to God and man's relationship to his fellowman. There is disrespect shown and a rebellious attitude demonstrated on the part of many. All of this leads to violence and suffering.

Actually, this comes back to those of us who are parents. We have not disciplined our children and taught them in many cases to be obedient to their fathers and mothers, to obey the laws of the land, and above all, to put God first in their lives. Had even a fair percentage of us done this, surely we would be living in a different world today. But we reap as we sow, and when we fail God we fail ourselves, our families, and all others.

Solomon said in the long ago, "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6). When it comes to the children, Paul exhorted, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth" (Ephesians 6:1-3). Paul says in Romans 13:1-7, "Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience's sake. For because of this you also pay taxes, for they are God's ministers attending continually to this very thing. Render therefore to all their due; taxes to whom taxes are due, customs to whom customs, fear to whom fear, honor to whom honor."

In order for us to be willing to be submissive to others,

whether parents, our teachers, those for whom we work, our government officials, or whoever, their authority must be established, and we must be brought to the point where we respect that authority. The same is likewise true when it comes to our relationship with God and His Son, Jesus Christ. We must realize that God is the creator and that we are the creatures of God's creation. We must recognize His great power and wisdom in the use of that power. We also must understand that He knows what is best for us, and that if we go against His wishes, we will have to suffer the consequences. Then we must understand that God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to this earth and gave Him authority to represent Him. God speaks today, but He speaks through His Son, and what He has said has been recorded in the pages of the New Testament (Hebrews 1:1,2). Christ Himself said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matthew 28:18). Based on that power or authority, He has the right to say what we should or should not do, and He has a right to expect that we obey Him, provided we want to be saved and go to heaven.

Please remember that the Lord will never ask us to do anything that is bad or wrong. He will not be unfair with us. Rather, He loves us, gave His life for us, and whatever He asks us to do will be for our good. We would then be wise to understand that, hear what He has said, and then do what He wants us to do.

There are many statements in the Bible that emphasize the necessity of obedience and that of doing the Lord's will. Christ said, "Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21). Christ then went on to say, "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand; and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, and it fell. And great was its fall" (Matthew 7:24-27). What made the difference between the wise man and the foolish man? One obeyed the laws of Christ and the other did not. Therefore, the one who obeyed the Lord was

blessed, and the one who did not was punished.

James said, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). Again he said, “But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word, this one will be blessed in what he does” (James 1:25). Speaking even of Christ, the Hebrew writer said, “Though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5: 8,9). Yes, even Christ was obedient to His Father, even to the point of death, and through His death He made it possible for us to be saved, provided that we would in turn obey Him. If Christ could do that, surely it is not asking too much that we obey Him.

Christ, dying for us on the cross that we might be saved, has laid down several conditions that we must obey if we are to be saved. For example, Christ said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). He has also said in His word that we must repent of our sins (Luke 13:3) and confess Him before men that He is the Son of God (Matthew 10:32). When we go through the Book of Acts we find that all who were saved were added to the Lord’s church as a result of their obeying these commands. What about those who refuse to comply with these conditions or who simply neglect to obey the Lord? Then they cannot be saved. It is just that simple. Christ has died for the lost, and God has provided His grace and mercy in making all of that possible, but those who fail to take advantage of it cannot expect to be saved. The Apostle Paul said that the Lord will come back one day to take vengeance on all of those who know not God and obey not the gospel (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). But whether having to do with the gospel, worship, living the Christian life, abstaining from the works of the flesh, or whatever else the Lord may ask us to do, or not do, we would be wise to obey Him. It is only through obedience that we can have His blessings.

Lesson 11

Justified

by the Blood of Christ

This study will have to do with being justified by the blood

of Christ. Since man was a sinner, that meant that sin stood between him and his Creator. God so hates and despises sin that He could not allow man to come into His presence while in that state. So how would it ever be possible for God and man to get together again?

In spite of man's sin, God had a great love for him and didn't want to see him eternally lost. But for him to be saved, a sacrifice was needed, a perfect sacrifice, a sinless sacrifice. He therefore chose to send His only Son to be that sacrifice. Even then it would be necessary for Christ to enter into this sinful world, live a sinless life, remain faithful to His Father, and then to be willing to humble Himself and to die a cruel death in order that He might be that blood offering and sacrifice that was required if man was to be saved.

With that as a background, we have the setting for the Lord's coming. He was promised, and spoken of in prophecy, and then finally we read of His birth in Matthew 1. It was even said that Mary would bring forth a son, conceived of the Holy Spirit, that His name would be Jesus, and that He would save His people from their sins (Matthew 1:20,21).

The scriptures tell us how that Jesus grew up, became a preacher, traveled over the country performing miracles to make believers out of the people, was betrayed by one of His own, and then because of envy and jealousy was taken into custody, given a false trial, was sentenced to death, and was crucified on a cross between two thieves. There His blood was poured out for the sins of the world. He had lived and died a perfect sacrifice, and now it would be possible for God and man to be united again, with the blood of Christ being applied to man's sins and therefore cleansing him and purifying him so that he might once more enter into the presence of God.

The apostle Paul said, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation" (Romans

5:8-11). Peter declared that we have not been redeemed or saved by corruptible things such as silver and gold, “Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God” (1 Peter 1:18-21).

Paul had this to say about the blood of Christ: “In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace” (Ephesians 1:7). Christ himself said, “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

In the verses that we have read up to this point, it is suggested that God and man were enemies, but that Christ shed His blood so that man might be cleansed and forgiven of his sins. This being done, man was again able to come into the presence of God, that he was reconciled through the atonement that He made on the cross, and that it was now possible for man to be saved not only in this world but in the world to come as well.

We have also read that it was possible for man to be forgiven or to have the remission of his sins. But how was the blood applied so that this would be the result, or how was it possible for man to come into contact with the blood of Christ so that he could be forgiven?

The scriptures teach that even though God provided salvation through Christ by His grace and mercy, still man must comply with certain conditions to be saved. This is to test his faith and his desire to be saved, but even after all of that, after obeying the Lord’s commands to be saved, he cannot boast that he has earned his salvation, because there would be no possible way for man to ever fully pay the Father for the sacrifice that He made in giving His Son that man might be saved. The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, therefore, represents the good news of salvation, and Christ Himself commanded the apostles to go into all the world and preach this gospel or good news to every creature. He further commanded them

to preach: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). On other occasions the Lord commanded the necessity of repentance and that of confessing Him before men as being the Son of God (Luke 13:3; Matthew 10:32). Then when we turn to Acts 2 we have Peter and the apostles preaching to a large crowd of people who had assembled in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, and once they were convinced that Christ was the Son of God, they asked what they should do. The record goes on to say, “Then Peter said to them, repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Reading on, we are told that some three thousand gladly received the word and were baptized and the Lord added the saved to His church (Acts 2:41,47).

But what does the remission of sins and the forgiveness of sins through the blood of Christ have to do with belief, repentance, baptism, and being added to the church? Just this! In Romans 6 we have Paul showing that as one obeys the Lord through his faith in Christ, dying to his sins, which would be repentance, and being buried in the waters of baptism, that one comes in contact with the benefits of the death of Christ, that is, His blood, and his sins are washed away, and then he is raised or resurrected from that watery grave to walk in newness of life. In other words, in obeying the Lord’s commands one pictures Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection in his actions. Another example of coming in contact with the blood of Christ has to do with the apostle Paul. Back when he was obeying the Lord, he had become a believer, was penitent of his sins, and then a gospel preacher came to him and told him that he should arise and be baptized and wash away his sins (Acts 22:16). But how could he have his sins washed away through baptism? By obeying the commands of the Lord, then he came in contact with the blood of Christ, and his sins were therefore washed away. It was just that simple.

Not only that, but the blood of Christ is associated with the Lord’s church. Paul said that Christ purchased the church with His own blood (Acts 20:28). That means that Christ died for the church, shed His blood for it. When we obey the Lord, and we are saved

by the blood of Christ, then we are added to the church by Christ Himself. That means that the church is made up of people who have been saved by the blood of Christ. That is why it is said that Christ purchased the church with His blood. That is also why the church is so important.

Then as we continue faithful in the Lord's service, His blood continues to cleanse us of our sins (1 John 1:7) and we remember the blood of Christ each first day of the week as we partake of the Lord's Supper in our worship to God. Truly, then, we are justified by the blood of Christ.

Lesson 12

What It Means to Be “in Christ”

For our consideration at this time we are going to be studying about what it means to be in Christ.

There are any number of scriptures that speak of being in Christ. We'll begin our study by reading some of those. The Apostle Paul said, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Again, he said, “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place” (2 Corinthians 2:14). Paul said, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Corinthians 5:17). In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul warned, “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.”

Continuing to note those scriptures that refer to being in Christ, next we go to Ephesians 1:10-14: “That in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth — in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.” And finally in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 we read, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”

What do all of these verses of scripture mean? Well, all of them have one thing in common, and that is that each one of them speaks of being in Christ. That leads us to the next question, which is, what does it mean to be in Christ, and how can one be in Christ? We'll answer the last part of that question by saying that it would be

obvious that when the scriptures talk about being in Christ, they are referring to a spiritual state that one is in, and not a physical state.

Next, to answer the first part of that question, which is, what does it mean to be in Christ? From the scriptures we have read we would have to conclude that to be in Christ would mean that one is saved, that he is a new creature, that he has victory, and that he has hope. Again, Paul says that if we are in Christ we have access to all spiritual blessings. Hear him as he says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). Paul is speaking to the Christians at Ephesus, and he explains to them that in Christ they have been blessed with all spiritual blessings. What would be some of those blessings? Salvation, the gift of the Holy Spirit, brethren, being in the church, fellowship, the privilege of prayer, forgiveness, and the hope of eternal life.

In all fairness, however, it should be pointed out that these blessings are reserved for only those who are in Christ. That means they are not available to those who are outside of Christ. If all people possessed them equally, whether they obeyed God or not, there would be no advantage of being in Christ, or being a Christian, and a child of God.

In writing to the Romans, Paul stated, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1). To understand what is being said here, you must realize again that Paul is speaking about those who are in Christ. Being in Christ, they are saved, and they have the hope of eternal life. There is no fear of condemnation, or of being lost, provided they walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit. That is, they are not to involve themselves in the things of the world, or in sinful practices, but rather they are to walk after the Spirit, or according to the teachings of the Spirit, which would be the word of God. So that is very simple and to the point, but at the same time, very reassuring that the Lord will bless and care for those who are His, if they will but remain faithful to Him.

The next question that comes to mind is this: How can one get into Christ? Does one just believe that He is the Christ, and that

means that he is already there? Can one enter Christ by confessing Him to be the Son of God, by living a good life, or just how is it done? There is no big mystery associated with this question. The scriptures pointedly tell us how this may be done. Going over to Romans 6:3, Paul says, “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”

The same writer says again, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26,27). From reading these two passages of scripture, I think you will have to admit that in both cases Paul is clearly stating that one enters Christ through the act of baptism. Is there any other way to enter Christ? None that I have read about. Surely if there had been some other way to enter Christ then Paul would have explained that one could enter Christ by baptism, but that it was also possible to enter Christ in some other way. But he didn’t do that. Rather, in both of his statements, and being guided by the Holy Spirit as he penned these words, he said that baptism puts one into Christ. That means that if a person believes that it is possible to be saved without being baptized, he is saying that one can be saved outside of Christ, and then later, after he is saved, he may want to be baptized to enter Christ. Now is that what Paul said? Certainly not. We can see the problems that are created when man does not choose to accept the truth as it is.

Again, Paul talks about being baptized into the body of Christ or the church (1 Corinthians 12:13), and this would mean that the same baptism that puts one into Christ also puts one into the church, and therefore to be in Christ is to be in the church or to be in the church is to be in Christ. To be in Christ or the church simply means that you are in a saved state, that you belong to the Lord, that you have all of His blessings, and that you have the hope of life beyond the grave.

In conclusion, let me ask you if you are in Christ, if you are a member of the Lord’s church. If not, then you are lost and have no hope. I would pray that this study would cause you to want to obey the Lord while you still have time and opportunity.

Lesson 13

The Church that Jesus Built

Our lesson at this time will have to do with the church that Jesus built. I hope you will seriously consider the things that I have to say about this subject.

We know that there are many churches in the world today, but we are not going to spend our time discussing all of those different religious groups. Rather, we want to go back to the Bible and learn of the church that Jesus built. If we can get a clear picture of that church, and of its true identity, then surely we will be able to know the kind of church that the Lord would have us to be members of today.

First of all, let us understand that the scriptures will give us all of the information that we need about Christ's church. It will tell us who built the church, what its foundation was, where it began, the name by which it was known, the head of it, the saviour of it, its purchase price, terms of membership, its organization, worship, work, etc.

So let us begin by turning to Matthew 16:17-19. After Peter and the apostles had confessed Christ as the Son of God, we read, "Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." You will notice here that Christ states clearly that He would build His church. He was going to build but one, and it would be His.

Next, while we are dealing with Matthew 16:17-19, let us see what the foundation of the church was going to be. As already noted, Peter and the apostles had confessed Christ to be the Son of God. Then Christ responded by saying that upon that rock, or upon the confession that He was the Son of God, that He would build His church. The church therefore was not going to be built on Peter, but upon Christ, and that is what it rests on up to this day. There are many other passages of scripture that confirm this, but please

hear the words of Paul when he said, “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 3:11). Can there be any doubt as to what the foundation was? Surely not.

Now we will proceed to the next question which is, where did the church have its beginning? To answer that question we need to be aware of the fact that it is necessary to read through the New Testament so that the beginning of the church can be pinpointed to a particular place and time. In reading the first four books any time the church or kingdom is spoken of, it is always said that it will be built sometime in the future. That means that the book of Acts will reveal to us both where the church had its beginning, and when it was established. First, after the Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection, and just before His return to the Father in heaven, He commanded His apostles to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15,16). He further stated that they should remain in Jerusalem until they be endued with power from on high, and then they would be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and finally to all the world (Luke 24:44-49; Acts 1:8). In Acts 2 we find the apostles in Jerusalem, it is the day of Pentecost, a Jewish feast day that brought Jews to Jerusalem from all parts of the world, and it was on that day that the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the apostles, and they began to speak in other languages, and they preached the gospel to the people that were there. As a result of all of this, some three thousand souls gladly received the word and were baptized and the Lord added the saved to His church. So here in the city of Jerusalem we have the beginning of the church. Whose church was it? It was Christ’s church, or the church of Christ, the church that Christ promised to build, the church that belongs to Christ.

Since we know now where the church had its beginning, we should be able to determine when it began. According to the setting in Acts 2, being on the day of Pentecost, in the city of Jerusalem, historians tell us that this took place in approximately A.D. 33. That means that any church that came into existence before that time could not be the Lord’s church. It also means that of all those churches which have come into existence hundreds of years

later, are much too young to be Christ's church. To be the scriptural church it had to be established by Christ in the right place and at the right time.

With Christ being the founder and owner, naturally it would wear His name. Although it began in Jerusalem, it spread throughout the world. Congregations of that one church sprang up everywhere. All of them wore the Lord's name. That is why we have Paul speaking of churches of Christ in Romans 16:16. In 1 Corinthians 12:27 he was speaking of the body of Christ, but when you understand that the body is the church and the church is the body (Colossians 1:18; Ephesians 1:22,23) then you know that he is talking about the church of Christ. If Christ built the church, and it belongs to Him, then what other name would it wear? Even its members wear the name of Christ, being called Christians (Acts 11:26; Acts 26:28; 1 Peter 4:16). We are told that salvation is in the name of Christ (Acts 4:12) and that we are to do all things in that name (Colossians 3:17).

In Ephesians 5:23, and several other verses of scripture, we are told that Christ is head of the church. He is also said to be the saviour of it, having died for it, and thus purchasing it with His own blood (Ephesians 5:23,27; Acts 20:28).

Now the question comes as to how to enter it, or what the terms of its membership would be. Christ simply commanded the apostles to take the gospel to all the world and to tell each individual that if he would believe and be baptized that he could be saved. Peter and the apostles told the people on the day of Pentecost, after they had become believers, that they should repent and be baptized for the remission of their sins. Then on doing this, the record says that the Lord added the saved to the church (Mark 16:15,16; Acts 2:31,47).

The Lord would have each congregation to have its own elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1), preachers and teachers (2 Timothy 4:2; Matthew 28:19,20), worship God on the first day of the week (Acts 2:42; Acts 20:7), preach the gospel to all of mankind and engage in good works (Mark 16:15; 1 Corinthians 15:58).

This is the church we read about in God's word and that church exists today just as it existed in the beginning. The word of God gives all of the marks of identification of the church and

anywhere in the world where the Bible is preached, and there are people there who will believe it and obey it, then the Lord's church will exist there.

Are you a member of the church of Christ? If not, then you are lost because you are either not a member of any church or you are a member of the wrong church. If Christ is the saviour of the church, that means you must be a member of the church to be saved.

Lesson 14

Salvation

in the Name of Christ

The topic for our this study will be, Salvation in the name of Christ. If we are aware of the fact that there is a God in heaven, and that we are sinners, then we recognize our need for salvation. At the same time, we want to see how salvation is related to the name of Christ.

Much has been said about a name, whether it is important or not. Those of the religious world often reason that the name doesn't matter, that one name is as good as another. They use this kind of logic because there are many religious names and titles and they are trying to convince themselves and others that it really doesn't matter which name one wears, or uses, and that in the end all names are acceptable. But in the secular world, especially in the business world, we don't talk like that, do we? All such people recognize the importance of the name. Businesses spend much money trying to popularize their name. As often pointed out, when we use a well known product we usually have to pay more for it because we have to help pay for all of the advertising that was done to make that product popular. When it comes to writing checks, we must sign our name for it to be cashed. Certainly the one receiving the check would not find it funny if you left off your name. Further, when we buy a house, property, a car, or whatever it may be, if there is much value attached to it, we want to buy it in our name. No one would ever dare to do otherwise.

Most of us want our wives to wear our name. The same goes for our children. That denotes that our wives and children belong to us, and that we are responsible for them. They also recognize that and look to us for their needs.

Even with our own personal name, it is very important that we keep a good name. We are able to do that by being honest, always telling the truth, keeping our promises, paying our debts, and living a good life. When we do that, those around us are able to believe in us, to trust us, and to have confidence in us. They are not afraid of us, not afraid to do business with us, or to be seen in our presence. They know that we'll always do them right, and that we

are the kind of person they can come to if they have some special need, or if they need someone to turn to for advice. Having a good name like that does not come by accident. We have to protect our name and do whatever is necessary to keep a good name. There are many benefits that come to us when we have such a name. On the other hand, if we are liars, dishonest, won't pay our debts, etc., then we also have a name, but a bad name. What kind of friends would we have with a name like that? People would shun us. It would be hard to get a job. No one would want to loan us any money if we had some special need. So you can see that one's name is very important, and we would do well to try to keep a good name. Solomon said, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" (Proverbs 22:1). How true that is!

If the name is so important in our personal lives, in business, or whatever, then how could we fail to see the importance of the name when it comes to religion? We would have to be blind to fail to see that. But in this case it is not a matter of human reasoning, either for it or against it, but is a matter of what the Bible says about it. If we believe God's word we are going to have to accept what He says. With that thought in mind, please listen to these words: "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). According to the context here, Peter was speaking of Jesus Christ. Please notice that he said that salvation was in the name of Christ. No, salvation is not in the name of any man, religious or otherwise, but it is in the name of Christ.

Since salvation is in the name of Christ, we can understand the emphasis that is placed on His name in relation to obeying the gospel, the church, as individual followers of Christ, and the work we do for Him.

For example, we are told that when we believe in Christ, repent of our sins, and are baptized for the remission of our sins, we are to do that in the name of Christ (Acts 2:38). Christ himself said that we should be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost (Matthew 28:19,20).

Since Christ built the church and it belongs to Him, in as

much as He gave His life for it, and He is the saviour of it (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:28; Ephesians 5:23), it should come as no surprise that it would bear His name. In Romans 16:16, in speaking of the various congregations of the church, Paul wrote, “The churches of Christ salute you.” In 1 Corinthians 12:27, Paul wrote to the church at Corinth, “Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.” Remember now that he is speaking to the church at Corinth, but he refers to the church there as being the body of Christ. What is the body? Paul said in Ephesians 4:4 that there is one body. So whatever it is, there is just one. Then when we turn to Colossians 1:18 we have Paul speaking of Christ, and he says, “And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the first born from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence.” Also speaking of Christ in Ephesians 1:22,23 he declared, “And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.” Finally, in Ephesians 5:23 Paul wrote, “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the saviour of the body.” Please notice that in all of these verses that the body is the church and the church is the body. Now if Paul spoke of the body of Christ and the body is the church, that means he was speaking of the church of Christ. But how many churches are there? There is just one body, and the body is the church, so therefore there is but one church and it is the church of Christ. There may be many congregations of that one church, but all of those congregations, regardless of where they are located, make up the Lord’s church, so that means that there is but one church. If it is Christ’s church, then what else could it be called? If it is not the Lord’s church, then it is all right to use some other name. But remember, if it does not wear the Lord’s name that means that it does not belong to Christ.

Even the members of the church are to wear the name of Christ. In Acts 11:26 we are told that the disciples were first called Christians at Antioch. In Acts 26:28, after Paul had preached to King Agrippa, he said, “You almost persuade me to become a Christian.” And finally, Peter said, “Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed: but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Peter 4:16). In New Testament times those who followed Christ

were known as Christians. In other words, they honored their Lord by wearing His name. Should it be any different today? How can we honor the Lord if we do not wear His name or if we substitute His name with the names of men? Think about that.

Whether we are meeting for worship, involved in secular work, or whatever we do, Paul exhorted, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him” (Colossians 3:17). If we belong to the Lord we should honor Him in everything that we do and say.

Yes, salvation is in the name of Christ. Have you obeyed the Lord? Are you wearing the name of Christ?

Lesson 15

Unity of God's People

Our subject for this study will be, The Unity of God's People. God has always had a people. He will continue to have a people to represent Him as long as time shall stand. Without such people there would be no purpose for the world to continue. God's people represent Him; they represent what is good and right. They are the light of the world, the hope of the world.

One of the things that God has always wanted in His people is that of unity. That is because He has always wanted them to be together, to be united, and to be one. God's people, and the unity of God's people, represent God Himself, and that is beautiful to behold. It represents power and influence for good.

At the same time, God hates division. Solomon said, "These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto Him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:16-19). Jesus said, when He was being accused of doing His works by the power of Satan, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand" (Matthew 12:25). Paul exhorted the Christians of his day, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple" (Romans 16:17,18). So in all of these verses of scripture, and many others that could be given, we can see how God frowns on division and why He is opposed to it.

We know that the religious world is divided, and even among those who claim to represent God and His Son Jesus Christ, there are so many opposing groups. The believers are in all kinds of organizations, churches, and groups. They preach different doctrines, worship in different ways, and engage in different types of work. But God is not divided and His people are not divided. The majority of the religious people of our day do not worship and serve God,

but rather follow the teachings of men. This is so sad because the masses of the people are confused and find it difficult to tell who represents God and who does not. Of course this would not be difficult if they would but read the scriptures and come to know the truth about God, His people, and their work.

While the world sees the division, the word of God is emphasizing peace, oneness, and unity. Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth, “Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement” (1 Corinthians 1:10). Even while Christ was on the earth, he prayed to His Father concerning His apostles and those that they would convert. “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on Me through their word; that they all may be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that Thou hast sent Me. And the glory which Thou gavest Me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent Me, and hast loved them, as Thou hast loved Me” (John 17:20-23). Please notice that Christ prayed there that we might all be one. Are we one? Are we doing what we can to help answer the Lord’s prayer? Unity among God’s people will do more to encourage unbelievers to become believers in Christ than all the public preaching that we might do. There is nothing like practicing what we preach.

In Ephesians 4:1-6 the apostle Paul writes, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.” While we might discuss the oneness of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit with profit, I would especially like for us to think about the one body here, since the body represents the church and the church represents God.

As stated, the one body here has reference to the church. Paul defined the body as the church when he said that Christ “is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the first born from the dead; that in all things He might have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:18). Now if there is but one body, and it is the church, then that means there is but one church. But which church? That would be the one that Christ promised to build (Matthew 16:18), the one that was established on the day of Pentecost, in the city of Jerusalem, in approximately A.D. 33 (Acts 2), the one that Christ died for, is head of, is saviour of, and the one that He is coming back for one day (Ephesians 5). It is also that church that wears the name of Christ (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 12:27), and the one in which its members are called Christians (Acts 11:26). This is the one church of the Bible. It belongs to the Lord, serves the Lord, worships Him, and represents Him. These are God’s people. They are one in Christ and Christ has promised to be with them unto the end of the world (Matthew 28:20).

Those who will believe in God, and believe in Christ as being His Son, will repent of their sins, will confess Christ as the Son of God, and will be baptized for the remission of their sins, then the Lord has promised to save them and to add them to His church (Hebrews 11:6; John 14:1; Matthew 10:32; Acts 2:38; Acts 2:47). If all would do that, all would be members of the same church, and all of the believers in Christ would be united. How wonderful that would be, and what a blessing it would be to the whole world. Regardless of what others do, let us be sure that we obey the Lord, and that we become what He would have us be — His children and His people. Being united in Christ makes God’s people one with God. Our Father will accept nothing less than that.

Lesson 16

God Seeks True Worshippers

This study will be on the subject, God seeks true worshippers. Since the day that God made man and woman, up to the present, He has desired to be worshiped. Of all of His creation, only man and woman could do that, because only they possessed intelligence and the ability to choose whether they would or wouldn't. God could have forced man to worship Him, but that would have brought no satisfaction and honor to Him. Even to this day, man is still left with a choice. God wants every human being in the world to worship Him, and every one should, but the vast majority do not. It is like children rejecting their parents. We are God's creation. He has given us everything, and in spite of our departure from Him, He continues to shower many blessings upon us. How wonderful it would be if we could pause and think about all of these things, and see our mistakes, and turn back to the One who stands, as it were, with outstretched arms — waiting for our return.

In John 4 we have the story of Jesus talking to a Samaritan woman. As the conversation continued, she concluded that Jesus must be a prophet. Then she said, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship. Jesus said to her, Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth. The woman said to Him, I know that Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When He comes, He will tell us all things. Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am He" (John 4:20-26).

This is a good example of where a group of people, the Samaritans in this case, had gotten off to themselves and they had begun to worship, but they had departed from God and His way. Yet, the Jews believed that true worship had to take place in Jerusalem, because that was where the temple was. Their worship also had gotten to the point where it had ceased to have meaning and most of

the Jews worshiped according to the traditions of men. Jesus then explained that things were going to change. He said that the Father was seeking true worshippers, those who would worship Him in spirit and in truth. This worship would not be limited to that mountain, to Jerusalem, or to many other places, or to a particular race but wherever man might be in the world, he could worship. The only requirement would be that he worship God in spirit and in truth.

Notice that Christ said that God is a Spirit. This means that since God is not physical or human, but a spirit, he may be found anywhere in the world. Since man has covered the earth, that also means that he may worship his Father wherever he happens to be and know that the Lord will be present (Matthew 18:20).

God wants man to worship Him, but He will not force any one to do so. He would invite and encourage man to, but never compel him in any way to so honor Him. But should he choose to do so, then he must worship on God's terms, and not on his own. In that case, the first thing that God requires is that He be worshiped in spirit. This would imply that the worshipper must come before his Maker in all humility and sincerity with the desire to worship. His attitude is to please, to do whatever he can to praise and honor his Father. In the second place, God requires that He be worshiped in truth or according to His teaching. God knows what He wants, and the worshipper must be familiar with this, and worship Him as He has specified. How dare anyone attempt to worship God on his terms, or to offer worship that would be on the basis of what he feels would be acceptable to God. If we are going to worship, then we must do it to please God, and not to please ourselves. If we are going to be pleased, it should be on the grounds that we are doing those things that our Father wants us to do.

We know that in the religious world that God is worshiped in many ways. Even the Lord spoke of those who were worshipping in vain because they were worshipping according to the doctrines and commandments of men (Matthew 15:9). Paul spoke of those people in Athens as being those who were ignorantly worshipping because they were worshipping the unknown God (Acts 17:23). Many of our day worship according to their feelings, or whether they like it or not. But again, it is not a matter of what we like, but it is a matter

of what God wants. What we like may not be what God wants at all. Or we might not see any need of doing something, but if God wants us to do it, then we must do it, if we are to worship Him.

The scriptures clearly identifies the day on which God has specified that we are to assemble for the purpose of worship. That day is the first day of the week. In Acts 20:7 we read, “And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.” We also learn from that verse, and other scriptures, that the Lord’s people were to assemble to partake of the Lord’s Supper; that is, they were to eat unleaven bread in remembrance of the body of Christ, and they were to drink of the fruit of the vine in remembrance of the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 11:23-29). They were to assemble to study God’s word, as in the case of Paul preaching to those who we read about in Acts 20:7. There are any number of other passages that show the importance of Bible study, such as 2 Timothy 2:15 and John 5:39. In 1 Corinthians 16:1,2 and 2 Corinthians 9:6 Christians were commanded to assemble on the first day of the week for the purpose of giving of their means. They were to give as they had been prospered, as they had purposed in their hearts, and they were to do it liberally and cheerfully.

Continuing, Christians were also commanded to sing praises to God. Paul said to the Ephesian Christians, “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19). According to this verse of scripture God declared that His people were to sing, that the melody was to be made in the heart, that the songs were to be spiritual and scriptural. No where in the New Testament do we have an example, or a command, that mechanical music was to be used in worship to God. Remember that Christ said that God was to be worshiped according to truth, that is, according to His will. That is why we must limit our praise to God to vocal music. And finally, the scriptures tell us that when God’s people gather for worship they are to engage in prayer. We read in Acts 2:42 that the Christians there in Jerusalem “Continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

So this is what God has stated in His word that we are to do as we offer worship to Him. But remember that Christ said that God seeks true worshippers to worship Him. Who would they be? Again, according to the scriptures, they would be those who have heard and obeyed the gospel, the saved, those who have been added to the Lord's church, those who are faithful followers of Christ, and finally, even they are to worship God in spirit and in truth, as we have already seen.

Lesson 17

The Lord's Day

In this lesson we will consider the importance of the Lord's Day. God has always had a day for His people. In Old Testament times there was the Sabbath Day, which was the seventh day of the week (Exodus 16:26). It was one of the ten commandments in the law of Moses, a day that was to be remembered and kept holy (Exodus 20:8). It was also a day of rest (Leviticus 16:31).

Even during the days of Christ, the law was still binding and therefore the sabbath was still being observed. Christ came, however, not to destroy the law but to fulfill it. Jesus said, "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets; I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill" (Matthew 5:17). In Luke 24:44 He said, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me." This statement was made after His death, burial, and resurrection, through which He took out of the way the old law, the Law of Moses, along with the Sabbath, tithing, and many other things, and replaced it with a new law, or the New Testament, as we read in Hebrews 9:15-17 and Hebrews 10:8-10.

In spite of the fact that Christ fulfilled the law and took it out of the way, replacing it with a new law, still to this day there are some who go back to the old law and take portions of it, like the Sabbath and tithing, and bring it over to our time and try to force it on everyone. The apostle Paul discusses this very thing in 2 Corinthians 3. He says of those who were trying to hold on to the law, "But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their hearts. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away" (2 Corinthians 3:15,16).

But if the old law, along with the Sabbath day, has been removed, then what do we have today? As already stated, we have a new law and we refer to that as the New Testament. Under this law, and during this period of time, God speaks to us through His Son, Jesus Christ (Matthew 17:5; Hebrews 1:1,2). Also, we have a new day of worship, and that day is referred to as the Lord's Day (Revelation 1:10) or the First Day of the Week (Acts 20:7). This day is not

a holy day, in the sense that it is a rest day, or that one would be put to death or punished in some other way for using it as a work day. Rather, it is a day that the Lord has set aside for worship, and it is up to each one to choose whether it will be used in this way or not. The First Day of the Week, however, is not the Christian's Sabbath day.

The significance of this day is seen in that Christ was resurrected from the grave on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1). Then when we turn to Acts 2, we learn that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the apostles on the day of Pentecost, that the gospel was first preached on that day, and that some three thousand obeyed Christ on Pentecost and this resulted in the establishment of the Lord's church. But what was Pentecost? It was a Jewish feast day that brought Jews together in Jerusalem from all over the world, but more importantly for our study, Pentecost always came on the first day of the week. That means that all of these things occurred on the first day of the week. Do you suppose that all of that happened by accident? No way. Rather, it was all planned by God and it was carried out on schedule.

Next, we read of the Lord's people meeting on the first day of the week for worship. The record says, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7). Why did they meet on the first day of the week? Why didn't they meet on some other day? They met on that day because this was the day of the week the Lord wanted them to meet on for worship. How often do you suppose they did that? Well, under the old law, how often were they to remember the Sabbath day? They were to keep each Sabbath day simply on the basis that God had commanded that the Sabbath day be remembered. Although He didn't say every Sabbath day, yet they understood it to be every Sabbath day. The same is true with meeting on the first day of the week for worship. We do not read where the scriptures command that we meet each first day of the week for worship, but since there is a first day of the week in each week, we know that God wants us to worship each first day of the week. And that is how often we assemble for the purpose of partaking of the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-29). The same is true with the

other acts of worship (Acts 2:42).

The first day of the week is mentioned when it comes to the day that Christians are to assemble for the purpose of giving of their means. Wonder why we would be asked to do that on the first day of the week? Simply because Christians assemble on that day for worship, and therefore it is a convenient time to give. But listen to the words of Paul when he said, “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: on the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come” (1 Corinthians 16:1,2). After reading this, who could deny the fact that Christians are to assemble on the first day of the week to contribute of their means?

I think now you are beginning to see the importance of the Lord’s Day, or the first day of the week. As we have already explained, it is not a Sabbath day, a holy day, a rest day as such, but it is the day that the Lord has said that His people are to assemble on for the purpose of worship. It is not the last day of the week. The world, of course, calls it Sunday.

Many countries use Sunday as their weekend holiday. Some of these do not even believe in Christ or follow Christianity. It is very convenient for believers in Christ since they do not have to work on Sunday and therefore can use it for worship. There are other countries that take off on Friday or Saturday. In such countries, Sunday is just another work day. That means that the Christians who live there have to worship the Lord in the early hours of Sunday morning, or in the evening after they have spent the day at work. It is more difficult for Christians where Sunday is a work day, but they can still obey the Lord’s command to assemble on the first day of the week to worship.

Are you a Christian? If not, you need to become one. You can do that by believing in God, and by believing in Christ as the Son of God. Then you need to repent of your sins, confess your faith in Christ, and be baptized for the remission of your sins. On doing that the Lord will save you and add you to His church.

If you are a Christian, do you meet with the Lord’s people each Lord’s Day for worship? If you don’t, you are unfaithful. You

need to decide that you are going to return to the Lord and be faithful to Him. A part of that includes being faithful in worship.

Lesson 18

Remembering Christ

The subject of this study will be, Remembering Christ. We not only want to live, but once we depart from this life, we want to be remembered. That is true with everyone, isn't it?

Tombstones are erected, monuments are set up, history books are written, and all kinds of things are done to remember the past and to remember people both great and small. Many countries even have a tomb to the unknown soldier. There is Independence Day, Republic Day, or some similar day to recall the beginning of our nation. There are parades, speeches, and all kinds of activity to emphasize the past, to celebrate the present, and to look forward to the future.

Likewise, our Father and His Son Jesus want to be remembered. God did many great things for His people, such as delivering Noah and his family from the flood, and as a sign of His promise that He would never destroy the world again with water, He placed a bow in the clouds (Genesis 9:8-17). I am sure that you have seen the bow, haven't you? We call it a rainbow, but the real significance of it is that it represents a promise from God, and every time we see that bow, that reminds us of God's promise not to destroy the world again with a flood. To this day God has kept that promise, and we can be sure every time we see the bow, that He will continue to keep His promise.

God brought the children of Israel out of the land of bondage by separating the sea, so that Moses and the people might cross over to the other side in safety. In all of that, and with the giving of the law, He performed many miracles. From that point on, as you read through the Old Testament, and even the New Testament, many references are found that point back to the things that happened in those days. Why? Because God wanted them to remember what He had done for them, so they might be moved to continue faithful to Him. When they forgot what He had done, and went off into sin, they had to suffer the consequences.

When we come over to the days of Christ, the greatest accomplishment associated with Him was His death, burial, and resurrection. Without that, everything else would have been mean-

ingless. But Christ came into this world to save man from sin. In order for that to become a reality it was necessary for Him to live a sinless life, and then to die for man's sins. We read then where one of the Lord's own apostles betrayed Him and turned Him over to an angry mob that took Him to a group of envious and jealous leaders. They in turn took Him to the Romans, where through the insistence of his enemies, He was given a false trial and sentenced to be crucified. After the crucifixion, Christ was buried, but three days later He came forth from the grave even as He had promised that He would. He therefore arose triumphantly, appeared some days before His disciples and the people in general, and then He returned to His Father in heaven, to sit down at His right side, to reign as King of kings and Lord of lords. Through all of this, He became man's saviour, giving him hope in this world and in the world to come.

Now the Lord wants those who obey Him and become members of His church to remember Him and the price that was paid that they might be saved. Even before the Lord's death, He gathered His apostles together and instituted the Lord's Supper. This supper would serve as a memorial feast for His people; that is, after His death, burial, and resurrection, and after the establishment of His church. They would meet each first day of the week, or each Sunday, to partake of the bread in remembrance of the Lord's body, and drink of the fruit of the vine in remembrance of His blood. Turn with me to Matthew 26:26-30, and we will read the actual account of the institution or the giving of the Lord's Supper. We read concerning Christ and the apostles, "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives."

Notice that the Lord said He would not partake of it again until that day when he would drink it new with them in His Father's kingdom. He meant that once the church was established, and they

began to partake of this supper, then He would be present with them on such occasions (Matthew 18:20).

After the church was established, we read where the Lord's people gathered on the first day of the week to worship, and part of that involved partaking of the Lord's Supper. We read, "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow, and continued his speech until midnight" (Acts 20:7).

The apostle Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth, "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat, this is my body which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (1 Corinthians 11:23-30).

From these various verses we can see how Christ instituted this memorial feast, that is, the Lord's Supper. It is to be partaken of by Christians, members of the Lord's church, and this is to be done on the first day of the week. The bread represents the body of Christ, and the fruit of the vine represents the blood of Christ. We are to partake of the bread and fruit of the vine in memory of Christ and the suffering that He experienced in His body, and in memory of the shedding of His blood on the cross that we might have the remission of our sins. Likewise, in partaking of it, we are telling the world that we believe in the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and through such, we point to the time that He will come again. We are also to examine ourselves, to be sure that we are faithful to the Lord, that we are doing it in all sincerity, and in harmony with His will. As we do so, He is honored and we are strengthened by

it. Christ wants to be remembered, and this is the way that He has declared that we are to remember Him. If we fail to partake of the Lord's Supper, it means that we have forgotten Christ.

Are you a Christian? Do you partake of the Lord's Supper each first day of the week? You are doing that if you are a Christian. If you are not, you need to obey the Lord while you have time and opportunity.

Lesson 19

What Prayer Can Do

Our study now will be, What Prayer Can Do. First of all, do you believe in prayer? Do you believe that God hears and answers prayer? Many do not. I must tell you that I do. But there is a lot to be said about prayer, and we want to go to the Bible as a basis for our study.

Let us begin by defining prayer. Prayer is a word that is used to explain what happens when man talks to God. It means intercession, supplication, and making requests of God. Paul wrote Timothy, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty” (1 Timothy 2:1,2). Again Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi, “Be careful for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6). So prayer is simply talking to God.

Before we talk about what prayer can do, we need to talk some about what prayer will not do. There are many false ideas about prayer. Some think that all a sinner has to do to be saved is to simply pray to the Lord for the forgiveness of his sins, and the Lord will save him on the spot. The Bible does teach that if the Christian will confess his faults, and pray to the Father, that he can be forgiven (James 5:16). But there is a difference in the Christian’s prayer for forgiveness and the sinner asking that he be forgiven of his sins. The Christian is a child of God, but the sinner is not. No where in the New Testament does it teach that the sinner can be forgiven of his sins, and thus to become a child of God, and a member of the Lord’s church, through prayer only. Rather, the scriptures clearly teach that the sinner must hear the gospel, believe in God and Christ His Son, repent of his sins, and then he must be baptized. Christ said, “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16). Peter and the apostles told those on the day of Pentecost, after they had become believers, and wanted to know what they should do, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of

sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). It was only when they had done this that they were saved and were added to the Lord's church (Acts 2:47). And it was only after this that we read, "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

Many people believe that through prayer miracles can be performed today. And so we have them praying that God will miraculously heal the sick, give sight to the blind, cure cancer, as well as numerous other things. But my friends, God has not promised to hear and answer such prayers. That is altogether contrary to His will. "But isn't God powerful?" someone asks. Yes, He is all powerful. "Then didn't Christ perform miracles?" He most certainly did, but that doesn't mean that miracles can be performed today. When we understand the teaching of God's word, we accept the fact that Christ and the apostles performed miracles to convince the people that they were of God, and therefore to confirm the word. John says that since the word has been confirmed now, there is no longer a need for miracles to make believers (John 20:30,31). Today the Lord works through His laws, physically and spiritually, and that cannot be changed even through prayer.

With the foregoing being true, what can prayer do? First of all, prayer is one of the blessings that is bestowed on the Christian. That doesn't mean that all cannot pray, but it does mean that the Father has promised to hear only His children. If one wants to be a child of God, and have God as his Father to hear his prayers, he should become a child of God. It is just that simple. The same is true with heaven. It is for the child of God, not for everyone. Therefore, if one wants to go to heaven he must become a Christian. There are those who get excited when it is pointed out that prayer is a blessing reserved for the Christian, but such people don't know their Bible or they would not become so alarmed.

It is through prayer, as we read earlier in Philippians 4:6, that we are to make our requests known unto God, that we are to thank our Father for all of His blessings, etc. But you might want to know what good it would do to pray for the sick, for example, if God is not working miracles today. Simply because James says

that if we have any that are sick that we should pray for them and “the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up” (James 5:15). The Lord then knows their condition, and in His providence can work through medicines, doctors, and nurses to help that person get well. He made the world and all things therein. He therefore made the medicines and has made the doctors, nurses, and even the patient. He could perform a miracle, but He has not chosen to do that in our age. But who says that limits God and makes it impossible for him to work and to help people to recover from their sicknesses? Paul said, “Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:26,27). As Paul said, one of our problems with prayer is that we do not understand prayer and how we should pray. We are like little children and think we should be able to ask our father for anything that may come to our mind, and because He is our Father, that He should immediately grant our requests. But we know that it doesn’t work that way. The father might not be able to grant the request, or it might not be for our good. Likewise with our heavenly Father — He knows us, and He knows our needs, what is good for us, and what would harm us. So He has to consider our requests, and answer them according to our need, and whether it will be for our good. When we have confidence in our Father, then that will within itself remove the problems that arise concerning prayer.

John said, “And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him” (1 John 5:14,15).

As children of God, and as we make mistakes and sin, we can always pray to the Lord for forgiveness. John said, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). James says that if we will confess our faults and pray for one another that the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16).

Being God's people, we can pray for ourselves, for our families, for our loved ones, for our leaders, and for all. We can pray for the sick, that the lost might come to the truth, that we might have help in time of need, etc. My! What would we do without the blessing of prayer?

If you are not a Christian, look at what you are missing. How can you go on without God?

Lesson 20

Living the Christian Life

The real test of becoming a Christian is being a Christian, or living the Christian life. Someone has wisely said that when you become a Christian that is only the beginning of what God expects of you. A baby may be born into this world, but what about the rest of his life? It is great to get a job, but that is when the work begins. One may enter school, but there are all of the classes and examinations that follow. That is the way it is with becoming a Christian.

One must become a Christian to be a Christian, but if he is not going to live the Christian life, then it was a waste of time to become one. Peter said, “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire” (2 Peter 2:20-22). Surely Peter’s description of a Christian going back into the world of sin is plain enough.

One should never become a Christian thinking that he is saved now and for all time and eternity. Neither should he become a Christian with the false idea that there is nothing to do, that the Christian life will be easy.

Living the Christian life means a life of worship. God wants His people to worship Him, and that is to be done each first day of the week (John 4:23,24; Acts 20:7). After three thousand had obeyed the Lord on the day of Pentecost, the record says, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42).

Living the Christian life means a life of purity. In becoming a Christian one repented of his sins and had his sins washed away in baptism (Acts 22:16). He thus became a new creature in Christ, old things having passed away and all things becoming new (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is what the new birth is all about — it gives a person

an opportunity to start over. But having put away the old man of sin, one now is prepared to live a pure and godly life (Colossians 3). Paul exhorted Timothy, “Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins; keep thyself pure” (1 Timothy 5:22). Peter said, “Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently” (1 Peter 1:22). Christ said, “Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

Living the Christian life means a life of following Christ. He is called a Christian because he is trying to be Christ-like (1 Peter 4:16). He is walking in the footsteps of Christ. Peter said, “For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21). The Christian then is attempting to apply all of the teachings and principles of Christ to his life. That is what makes him different from all other people.

Living the Christian life means a life of giving. First of all, we surrender our life to Christ. We becomes yoked to Christ (Matthew 11:28-30). We no longer belong to ourself, but we have been bought with a price (1 Corinthians 6:20). That means that Christ gave His life that we might be saved, and as a part of the church we have been purchased by the blood of Christ (Ephesians 5:12; Acts 20:28). That being true, it is not a matter of what we can get, but what we can give.

Living the Christian life means a life of growing. One grows in faith, love, meekness, service, and dedication. Peter said, “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Peter 2:2). Again, he said, “But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 3:18). Of course when one grows, then there comes strength. Paul declared, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Ephesians 6:10-12).

Living the Christian life means setting a good example. One must remember that as a Christian many will be watching to see how you live. Any time you make a mistake, they will be quick to tell you. They are hoping you will fall so that your life will not condemn them. It is therefore that much more important that you remember who you are and who you represent. Christ therefore said, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Living the Christian life means bearing good fruit. There is always much to do. The gospel is to be taken to all (Mark 16:15). The needs of our fellowman are to be met (James 1:27). Paul said, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 15:58). Christ put it like this: “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be My disciples” (John 15:1). He also said, “Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit” (John 15:2).

Living the Christian life means being faithful. The faithful are predictable people. They do that which is expected of them. They remain true to the Lord, and they must be faithful to the end if they are to receive the crown of life. Christ said, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). Again He said, “Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Revelation 22:14). James put it like this: “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him” (James 1:12).

And on and on we could go. Living the Christian life involves so much. It is a prayerful life, a victorious life. The Lord has promised to be with His people and as members of the church we have fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world. It is so rewarding and fulfilling to be a Christian. But there are those who would ask, “Isn’t the Christian life a boring life, a sad life?” No, it is just the opposite. It is a happy life, one that

is full of joy. As such, one has everything to live for, and likewise, everything to die for.

Are you a Christian? If so, then you know what I am talking about. If you are not one, please don't let another day of your life be wasted. Obey the Lord now and find out what living is all about. If you will, you will never regret it.

Lesson 21

The Faithfulness of God's People

In these Bible studies we have been talking about what God expects of us, both to become a Christian and to remain one. The subject for our lesson at this time will have to do with The Faithfulness of God's People.

The idea of being faithful suggests several things. It means that one is reliable, dependable, and that he continues to do whatever is expected of him. Someone has said that if one is faithful that he is predictable. That is, you can always be sure that he is going to be doing those things that the Lord wants him to do. On the other hand, you can be sure that he is not going to do those things that are bad or wrong. Such people have been serving the Lord long enough, have grown and developed to the point where you can always count on them to put the Lord first in all they do and say. That is the way it is in good marriages. The husband and wife are faithful to each other. There is never any doubt or suspicion concerning the other. They have full confidence in one another and are true to each other. That is a wonderful position to be in.

Likewise, God is faithful, and the same can be said of Christ. Paul said, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Corinthians 1:9). Again he said, "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Hebrew writer stated this: "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; for He is faithful that promised" (Hebrews 10:23). In 1 Peter 4:19 we read of God as being a faithful Creator, and in 1 John 1:9 we are told that if we will confess our sins that the Lord "is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." We are told further that the Lord is not slack concerning His promises (2 Peter 3:9), that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), and that He will be with us always even to the end of the world (Matthew 28:20).

When we become believers in God, and Christ being the

Son of God, and we obey the Lord, He saves us and adds us to His church (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Acts 2:47). Once we have done that we have made a commitment to the Lord, a commitment for life. We are saying, "Lord, I am yours now. I belong to You, heart, soul, and life. I will now give the rest of my life to You. You will be my Lord and Master. I will therefore be true and faithful to You unto death." As for the Lord, this is what He expects. Paul said, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:1,2). James says, "But whosoever looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed" (James 1:25). John wrote, "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14). Christ said, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

As Christians, and members of the Lord's church, we are the bride of Christ. Christ then is the bridegroom. As we have seen, Christ will always be faithful to the bride. But what about the bride? Christ expects His bride to be faithful to Him. In Ephesians 5 Paul shows the relationship that a husband and wife have in marriage. He shows the similarities when it comes to Christ and His church. He says, "For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and He is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. That He might present it to Himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the

church: for we are members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones" (Ephesians 5:23-30). The Apostle Paul wrote the Romans, "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God" (Romans 7:4). Here Paul speaks of them as being married to the law, that is, they were expected to keep the law as long as it was binding. But with the death of the law, or with it being fulfilled by Christ, and therefore being taken away, he said that this made it possible for them to be married to another, and he identifies that person as being in Christ. In other words, as Christians and members of the church, being the bride of Christ, they had become spiritually married to Christ. Likewise the same is true with us today. Now what is expected in marriage? Faithfulness on the part of both partners. Therefore Christ expects us to be faithful to Him.

Our faithfulness covers a wide area. We are to be faithful to the Lord in our faith, love, and devotion to Him. Jesus said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37). We are to be faithful to the Lord in doctrine. John said, "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). That is, we are to believe, preach, and teach only the truths as set forth in the Bible. We are not to add to it, subtract from it, or substitute for it in any way (Revelation 22:18,19; Galatians 1:6-9).

We are to be faithful to the Lord in our worship and work. Christians are to meet each first day of the week to worship God (Acts 20:7). The Hebrew writer tells us, "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another, and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries" (Hebrews 10:25-27). Paul declares that we are to always abound in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). Christ expects us to bear good fruit (John 15:8).

We are to be faithful to the Lord in our moral living. Paul

said, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him” (Colossians 3:17).

The faithful then will be rewarded with a home in heaven (John 14:1-3).

Are you a Christian? Are you a member of His church? Are you faithful to the Lord? The Lord wants you to become a Christian, and a member of His church, but once you do that, you must be faithful to Him, even unto death, if you expect to be eternally saved.

Lesson 22

Living With One Another

For our study at this time we are going to be talking about living with one another. The world is full of people. The population is steadily growing at an alarming rate. Most of this vast number of people are living in Asia. China already has over one billion inhabitants. In a short time India will be joining the billion club.

All of this makes us aware of man's needs physically and spiritually. It also makes us realize that all of these people must live together, even in very crowded conditions. And that means they must learn how to get along with each other. When nations find it difficult to have good relations, we can understand why man has so many problems when it comes down to a personal level. Of course we are reminded sometimes that nations only reflect what is going on in our local communities, except it is just on a larger scale, and that is probably right. If we can't get along with each other personally, then how can we expect whole countries to go along without ever having any problems?

Someone has said that no man is an island. That just simply means that no one can be self-sufficient living to himself, and never needing anyone's help. To the contrary, we need God and we need one another. Man is a spiritual being, and so he needs God, but he is also a sociable being, and that means that he needs those around him.

Having spiritual needs, we must come to know of God and His Son, Jesus. We must read and study the Bible so that we may not only come to believe (Romans 10:17), but that we may learn what His will is for us, and then to obey that will. With a proper relationship with the Lord, this will also make it possible for us to have a good relationship with our fellowman.

Living in this world we have our parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and people in general to live with. If we are married we have our husbands and wives, our children, etc. Even as Christians and members of the church, we must have dealings with one another, and this demands that we have the proper attitude, and that we respond to our brethren, regardless of circumstances, with a Christian spirit.

Our Lord has given us a perfect example to follow, but He has also given us teachings and principles that will help us to live together, and to get along with one another (1 Peter 2:21).

Christ said that the number one thing that should be found in our lives is love. He said that we should love God, and that we should love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 22:36-39). He also said that we should love our enemies. Can you believe that? He said, “But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44). Just imagine what a different world we would have today if everyone did this! Is it possible? Of course it is. All we need to do is just do what the Lord asked us to do. Christ said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:35).

Second, Christ taught that we should do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Matthew 7:12). This has been called the golden rule, and indeed it is. But again, He went beyond that when He said that we should even do good to them that hate us (Luke 6:27). Paul said, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Galatians 6:10).

Third, we are to be willing to forgive those who sin against us or who do us wrong. Christ taught the disciples to pray, “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (Matthew 6:12). He went on to say, “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Matthew 6:14,15). Peter asked the Lord how many times he should forgive his brother, if he should forgive him seven times. Then we read, “Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times; but, until seventy times seven” (Matthew 18:22). In saying that, Jesus was saying that we should not put any limitation on how many times we will be willing to forgive one, if he asks that we forgive him.

Fourth, we should always be honest in our dealings with one another. Paul said, “Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men” (2 Corinthians 8:21). That means that we should always tell the truth and never lie.

As you can see, the Lord has given us numerous ways that will help us with our dealings with one another. Here are some thoughts from the apostle Paul: “Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another; not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord. Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. Bless them which persecute you; bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceable with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:9-21).

The apostle Peter wrote, “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it” (1 Peter 3:8-11). And on and on we could go, but surely you see that the principles and teachings that Christ gave to his people, and for all others who will accept them, are those things that are for the good of man, and for his fellowman. Those who then accept Christianity are going to be benefitted, and those who practice Christianity are going to be a blessing to all those around them.

If you are not already a Christian, you are encouraged to learn more about it. The more you know about it the more you will like it. I would pray that this would lead you to become a Christian. The world today needs Christianity, and Christianity needs you.

Lesson 23

Working with God

I want to study with you at this time about working with God. First, I would like to remind you that the heavens and earth are the works of God. The Psalmist David said, speaking of God, “Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands” (Psalm 102:25). The Hebrew writer said, “You, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But you are the same, and Your years will not fail” (Hebrews 1:10-12).

Not only did God make the heavens and the earth, but all things therein, and that included man and woman. Then He set the law of nature in motion whereby each living thing would be able to reproduce itself. We read, “Then God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields fruit according to its kind, whose seed is in itself, on the earth, and it was so” (Genesis 1:11). Continuing, “Then God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind; and it was so” (Genesis 1:24). Concerning man, we read, “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:27,28).

Now when God created man and woman, and all of the other living things, and set the law of reproducing into force, with the result of each one reproducing after their kind, then that made it possible for life to continue up to this time. But who is responsible for it? Whose work is it? We must admit that God is responsible for all of it, even up to this very hour.

Man has accomplished great things, but who created man? Who gave him his intelligence and his ability to learn and to do all these things? Again, it is God.

Although man has been able to do some great things, as man

himself views them and measures them, but that may be very little in comparison to what he might have been able to do, had he sought God's help. How can God bless man's efforts when he thinks he is all-wise, that he doesn't need God, and even rejects the idea of God? James said, "...for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God" (James 1:20). Some give lip service to God, but in reality they deny Him. Paul said concerning this type: "They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work" (Titus 1:16). Again, he said, "For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another" (Galatians 6:3,4).

God has done many things, as with the creation, but He has not seen fit to continue to miraculously create things. He sent His Son into this world to live and die for man that he might be saved, and then He gave man the job of taking this good news to the world. Christ commanded the apostles, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned" (Mark 16:15,16). You will note that the Lord not only commanded the apostles to take the gospel to every creature in all the world, but He told them to preach the terms of salvation. Those terms were that the hearer would have to believe and be baptized to be saved. The Lord did His part in providing salvation, but then after that it would be up to man to obey God and take the gospel to others. But what if man refused to take it? Then it would not be taken, because the Lord would not take it. What if man refused to obey the gospel that was taken? Then he would be lost because of his unbelief. When a person believes in the Lord with all of his heart he is going to do whatever the Lord has asked him to do, as in the case of the man from Ethiopia as recorded in Acts 8. But someone might say, "I thought salvation was provided by the grace and mercy of the Lord, and that one cannot do enough to be saved." That's right. Salvation is by grace and mercy (Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 3:5), but just because one obeys the Lord's commands to be saved, that doesn't mean that he has earned his salvation. One is just proving to the Lord, in that

case, that he believes in Him enough to obey Him. If one doesn't believe in the Lord enough to obey Him, then why should he think the Lord should save him anyway?

So the Lord needs workers today — those who will obey Him, become members of His church, and then carry out His orders. Paul said, "We, then, as workers together with Him also plead with you not to receive the grace of God in vain" (2 Corinthians 6:1). Again Paul wrote, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 6:1). Hear him again: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10). That means that we must be in Christ, in the church, to qualify to work with Him, and for Him to work with us. It means that we must accept each other, but that we must realize that He is the Lord and that we are the servants. If we will then carry out His instructions, He will bless us and bless those who will receive the message we proclaim by word of mouth and through the example that we set.

The Lord can take us and mold us and change us into His likeness, provided we will submit to Him, obey His will, and yield ourselves to Him and His wishes. He can make great workers out of us. He can work through us to accomplish His purposes and to do things we never dreamed possible. He wants to do more and more for us, and for others, if we will but work with Him.

The apostle Paul said, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). Reading on, he says, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Yet

in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 8:31-39). Paul said personally, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

My friends, if we are with the Lord and He is with us, then He will bless us and help us to bear much good fruit. What greater thing could we do in this world? There is nothing more important than saving souls — ours and others — as we carry forth the gospel of Christ to a lost and dying world.

Lesson 24

Bearing Good Fruit

In studying the Lord's word with you, I am aware of my responsibility in giving only what the Bible teaches. At the same time, I hope you understand the responsibility that you have of not only hearing God's word, but in obeying it. With that in mind, please think with me about bearing good fruit.

Jesus taught the lesson concerning the vine and the branches. I would like to begin by reading that account. He said, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples" (John 15:1-8).

In this story the vine represents Christ and His church. The branches represent those who are in Christ and His church. In other words, they are Christians. Life is in the vine and therefore we must be in the vine to be of value to the Lord. If we are not in Christ and His church then we are lost, and we will be eternally lost if we do not obey Him so that we can enter into the Lord. But how does one enter Christ and the church? There is but one way, and that is through obeying the Lord by believing in Him, by repenting of our sins, by confessing Christ as the Son of God, and by being baptized (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). Paul says that baptism puts one into Christ and into the church (Romans 6:3,4; Galatians 3:26,27; 1 Corinthians 12:13). But what about those who are in the vine or in Christ? The Lord says that they must bear fruit, and much fruit at that. What about those who fail to bear fruit? Then they will be taken away and cast into the fire to be burned up. This is another way to say that

they will be lost, eternally lost.

On another occasion Christ said, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore by their fruits you will know them” (Matthew 7:13-20). According to Christ, one’s fruit tells what kind a person he is, whether he has a good heart or not, whether he belongs to the Lord or not, or whether he is a false teacher or not. If he is a good person, he will bring forth good fruit. If he is bad, his fruit will be bad. But what happens to a tree that bears good fruit? It will be saved. But a tree that bears bad fruit will be cut down. The kind of fruit we bear tells the story. The question is, what kind of fruit are we bearing?

In Colossians 3 Paul shows how the old man of sin has been put off and the new man of righteousness in Christ has been put on. Let’s read some of this chapter to see the contrast. Paul says, “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory” (Colossians 3:1-4). Here Paul is talking about being risen with Christ, that is, those who have obeyed the Lord and have been raised from the watery grave of baptism to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-6). He says now that we are dead, now that we have repented of our sins and we have entered Christ through our obedience to Him, then our interests should be on heavenly things, not earthly things.

Paul continues, “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things

the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all, and in all” (Colossians 3:5-11). Here we can see that the writer is showing that at one time they engaged in all of these evil things, but now that they have put off that old man of sin through their obedience to the Lord, they have now put on the new man of righteousness in Christ, and being in Christ they are all one.

In reading further, Paul declares, “Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Colossians 3:12-14). And on and on he goes, but he is showing here that once the old man of sin has been put out of one’s life, then one is to fill his life with good things.

Turning to Galatians 5:22-26 the Apostle Paul lists some of the fruit of the Spirit. He says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.” We are being shown that if we have the Spirit within us, and we are guided by the word of the Spirit; if we are in Christ, and we are true to Christ, that we will bear the fruit of the Spirit. He is saying that here are some of the good things that will be found in you because of who you are, and he says there is no law against bearing this good fruit. No one will put you in prison for having love, joy, peace and faith in your heart and life. You will not be persecuted for being good and gentle and temperate. No one will seek to harm you because

of these or other good works in your life. How much better it is to be a Christian, and to bear these good fruits, than to remain in sin and to continue to bear bad fruit, the kind that hurts the individual producing it as well as those around him.

What kind of fruit are you bearing? Remember, by your fruit you will be known. It will be my prayer that you would want to become a Christian and a member of Christ's church so that you might bear the fruit of the Spirit. That is the only kind of fruit that is of any worth to man and to the Lord.

Lesson 25

Why We Are Here

Let's study together about why we are here. Who are you? Where did you come from? Why are you here? Where are you going? Did you know that there are a lot of people who cannot answer these questions? They don't know who they are, where they came from, why they are here, or anything else. They are just simply here, going blindly through this world.

Of course many in today's world believe in evolution. They think that life came from some small organism. They reason that life kept evolving until there was an ape-like creature, and then man finally came forth. How absurd for intelligent people to teach that, and how ridiculous for anyone to believe such. Think about a human being lowering himself to the point of actually believing that he came from an ape or a monkey. Unbelievable! Then there is the "big bang" theory that is presently going around. Out there in space millions of years ago there was a big bang, and out of all of that came life and the earth as we know it today. Again, how absurd. But regardless of what you begin with, where did that come from? It doesn't matter how far they go back, they have to begin with something. We believe that the matter is cleared up when you begin with God. But they think that you have to make a big story up to put God into the picture. Listen, God makes a lot more sense than beginning with a small organism or a big bang, but not telling where that first organism came from or what caused that big bang. No wonder so many people are confused today about themselves.

A few years ago a man by the name of Arthur Hailey of the U.S.A., a black man who had retired as an officer from the military, got interested in the history of the black man and where someone like himself had come from. He began to gather facts, and this led him all the way back to Africa and to the little country of Gambia. There he learned of his ancestors, the kind of conditions that must have prevailed at that time, and how they must have lived. He traced them as they were taken as slaves to the States, and what happened to them there, how freedom was finally won, and then on up to his birth. That book became a best seller in the States and around the world. It was so popular that even a TV series was made to tell

the story to the biggest TV audience in history up to that time. The book, and the TV series was called “Roots”. This led thousands and thousands of others to become interested in their roots, and to attempt to trace their ancestors back to Europe or from wherever they may have come.

For sure, it is interesting to go back into the records, if there are such, and learn of your forefathers, but if you could keep going, you would finally return to Noah, and even to Adam and Eve, since all people came from them, and since they came from God (Genesis 1:26,27).

As we study the Bible we find that God not only made man and woman, but He made them for a purpose, and that was so that they might be His children. He had planned for them to spend all eternity in the garden of Eden. Everything was there for them, even the tree of life. But God did not want to force them to worship Him, or to leave them without a choice. So He told them that they could partake of every fruit in the midst of the garden except for the tree of good and evil. He told them that the day they partook of that fruit they would die. Of course we know the story, how Satan, the old serpent, came to Eve and told her that she would not die, but that God knew that the day she partook of it that her eyes would be opened and she would become as a god. She listened, and partook of the fruit, and then she gave to Adam, and he ate. As a result of this, their eyes were opened, that is, they became knowledgeable in that they knew right from wrong, and now they were sinners. They died spiritually that day and were driven from the garden and away from the tree of life (Genesis 2,3).

God then promised to send His Son into the world to redeem man from his sin. This was accomplished when Christ came, lived among men, and was eventually crucified upon a cross to die for the sins of the world. In doing that, He made it possible for man to return to God, to be children of God, to have all of the Lord’s blessings in this world, and one day to live with Him for all eternity. We may read of this in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the New Testament portion of the Bible. This is God’s inspired record of what took place. This helps us to know what happened and what was done to restore man to that elevated position of being children of God.

The Hebrew writer put it like this: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You. And again, I will put My trust in Him. And again: Here am I and the children whom God has given Me. Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:9-15).

John said, “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure” (1 John 3:1-3).

But how do we become children of God or the sons of God? We do that by believing in God, and believing that Christ is the Son of God, by repenting of our sins, by confessing that Christ is the Son of God, and by being baptized to have our sins washed away (John 14:1-3; Acts 2:38); Matthew 10:32; Acts 22:16). Then Paul said, “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:26,27). The same baptism that puts us into Christ and makes us the Sons of God, also puts us into the church (1 Corinthians 12:13). In Acts 2:47 we are told that the Lord added the saved to His church.

So who are we? Physically, we can trace our ancestors back to Adam and Eve and to God who created them. Spiritually, when we obeyed God we were saved and the Lord added us to His church.

At the same time we entered Christ, we became God's children. Likewise we are called Christians (Acts 11:26). As children of God, as members of the Lord's family, the church, we have the hope of eternal life. If we are faithful to the Lord unto death (Revelation 2:10) we will go to live with the Lord for evermore. In life and death, and in heaven, we will praise the Lord for all eternity.

Who are you? I hope you are a Christian and a member of the church of Christ. If not, I encourage you to become one.

Lesson 26

Preparing To Meet God

We live today in a very wicked world. People are seeking after material things and the pleasures they can bring. The average person thinks and acts as though he is going to live forever here on earth. With these conditions prevailing, then who is thinking about the need of preparing to meet God? Truly it will be even as the Lord said it would be at His coming. He said, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only. But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matthew 24:36-39).

Yes, the Lord is coming back one day. We don't know when He will come, but He will come. He is coming to receive the righteous. Paul wrote, "But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

At the time the Lord comes, He will send His angels to gather out of His kingdom or church all that offend, or the unfaithful, that they might be cast into the fire to be burned up. In explaining the parable of the tares of the field to the disciples, Jesus said, "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and

gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:41,42).

Again Paul tells us that the Lord is coming to take vengeance on those that know not God and obey not the gospel. He said, "... and to you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9).

Christ will also come to judge man. We are told, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). In Acts 17:31 it is said that Christ will be that judge. Then in John 12:48 we are told that He will judge us by His word. At that time the righteous will go into life eternal, and the wicked will go away into everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:46).

Now it is for these reasons that we need to be preparing to meet the Lord. The foolish may go on their way seeking after the things of this world, but the wise will not only be aware of the coming of the Lord one day, but they will likewise recognize that there are also several other things to take into consideration.

The first thing we should remember is that we are living now, but the day will come in which we will have to die. The Hebrew writer tells us, "And it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). We have opportunities now to obey God, along with the freedom to choose to obey the Lord or to reject Him, but once we die our eternal destiny is sealed. The Lord has provided us with salvation and given us every opportunity to believe in Him and to obey His teaching, and we would be wise to take advantage of that offer.

As we noticed earlier, the judgment day is coming and at that time we will be judged, according to the way we lived this life. The Lord, the righteous judge, will be there to judge us and He will not make any mistake. How sad it would be to have to go before the Lord unprepared to meet Him. Please do not let this happen to you.

My friends, it will not be enough to go through this life liv-

ing a good moral life, and then to stand before the Lord thinking that He is going to save us. It is necessary to live a good moral life to go to heaven, but that alone is not enough. Cornelius and his household were good people, but they were not saved until they heard the gospel and obeyed it. Read Acts 10. Neither is it enough just to be religious. There are a lot of religious people who are lost. Christ said, “Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast our demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” (Matthew 7:21-23). Not only that, but money, wealth, a good education, knowing the right people, and so on, will not take you to heaven.

Then how can we prepare to meet the Lord? It is so simple that most people stumble over it. They can't believe that it is that simple. First, the Lord has already died for us and made it possible for us to be saved. All we need to do is to believe in Him and obey Him. Christ said, “Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me” (John 14:1). He also said, “I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish” (John 8:24). Now is there anything difficult about that? Next, the Lord has asked us to repent or to turn away from our sins. He warns us that we must repent or perish (Luke 13:3). But you are probably thinking that this is the catch, that this is where He really makes it hard on one. But why would it be hard to give up those things that are only hurting you, and one day they will destroy you? Christ doesn't ask us to give up one thing that is good. Next, He wants us to confess Him before men that He is the Son of God, and He has promised that if we will do that, He will confess us before the Father in heaven (Matthew 10:32). Imagine the Lord confessing us before the Father in heaven. How blessed can we be? And finally, He has commanded us to be baptized. He said, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved, but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16). Then He says that if we will do that, He will save us and add us to His church (Acts 2:47), and if we will remain faithful to the Lord in the church, then when He comes back to receive His church,

He will take us to heaven (Ephesians 5:27).

If you want to be blessed in this world, and in the world to come; if you want the best there is, the best the world has to offer; and the best the Lord has to give, then prepare to meet the Lord, and stay prepared.

